



To his mother,
Who has showed him steadfast love
And unqualified support,
This essay is affectionately dedicated by the author.

On Being and Heroism

An Essay in Post-Existentialist Ontology

By J.D. Leggett

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We should therefore surely regard it as of the utmost importance that the first stories [our children] hear shall aim at encouraging the highest excellence of character... God must surely always be represented as he really is.

Plato, The Republic

Preface

The hypothesis of existentialism is pressed with many difficulties¹; this field is riddled with genealogical landmines, and any truly rigorous ontological treatise is playing a hazardous game of chutes and ladders on a precipitous family tree. Let me abate the ornery sensibilities of bony-fingered philosophical historians before I suffer their waggings-at therewith—should we squirm at contradictions? Gaps in any logic herein are yours to be responsible for, but it is not an impossibility that bridges to span them exist, and that you are competent either to build or burn them.² If I treat haphazardly the doctrines of the idols now a century past their twilight, then we would wait in vain only for their champions to testify from the grave like Sir Galahad that they truly drank from the Holy Grail.³ “You build the sepulchers of the prophets, and your fathers killed them!”⁴ Only if you concede that the project of philosophy has been completed will I admit that Heidegger has a monopoly on the theory of being—“Dasein”—the essence of the observant subject; to commit the act of existing—existence qua interpretation, and interpretation qua [...].⁵ Would it be too impetuous to ask recusal from

¹ “The hypothesis of Vortices is press’d with many difficulties.” Sir Isaac Newton, *General Scholium*

² “If anyone finds this script incomprehensible and hard on the ears, I do not think the fault necessarily lies with me.” Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*

³ After seeing the Grail, Galahad is granted his request that he be allowed to choose the time of his death. While traveling back to

being scrutinized in the context of the development of the object of our inquiry? Or else only intellectual hoarders would be eligible for participating in the pastime of thinking.

The first half of this essay is both a critique of nihilistic modernism and the development of an ontological analytic lens which we call “heroism”⁶; the second half is its application, but if you insist, then perhaps this essay is nothing more than an attempt at a revival, an ode to the heroes, or a summons for conviction.

May my most meticulous readers place me where they will.

Arthur’s Court, Galahad is visited by the spirit of Joesph of Arimathea and chooses to immediately die.

⁴ Luke 11:47

⁵ See Heidegger’s *Being and Time*

⁶ “When we talk of heroism we talk of rare virtue.” Burke, *Reflections*

Part I:

Exposition of Existentialism

Origins of Ontology

*For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain
also of your own poets have said, For we are also his
offspring.*

Acts 17:28

*Thus the Devil played at Chess with me, and yielding a
Pawn, thought to gain a Queen of me, taking advantage of
my honest endeavours; and whilst I labored to raise the
structure of my Reason, he strived to undermine the edifice
of my Faith.*

Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*

⁷ “I thought it would be useful... to reform the style of the later British statutes... which from their verbosity, their endless tautologies, their involutions of case within case, and parenthesis within parenthesis,

Logic and Theology

How far we have come with the spellcraft of logic—our fifty-page syllogisms, “endless tautologies,”⁷ QEDs, and “therefores” have given us great mileage in several applications, but the next era will not be governed by logic—we have had quite enough of it. We are overfull of the Enlightenment’s rigorous brainchild. Having demystified lightning, plate tectonics, and microbiology, we have lost our enamor with them. Nature, made naked to us by our technological instruments, has become boring. We might have assumed during the optimistic birth of the computer—the externalization of man’s rational ability—that the capabilities of logic and the depths of discoverability are endless, but instead by the formal severance and isolation of the logical component of our soul into a machine it has been definitively shown that the essence of our humanity does not rest on logic, or else the invent of the computer would have been the outsourcing of our very Being—the desoulification of man—as if we were a mother praying mantis that dies upon birthing thus depleting humanity of its mysteriousness such as Franklin to lightning. Perhaps that is the case, but if not then there remains an element of ourselves—illogical or superlogical—that is essentially *us*—something more than mere computer: for Plato it was intelligence; for Aquinas it was revelation, as Theophrastus says, “there is another reality prior and

and their multiplied efforts at certainty by saids and aforesaid, by ors and by ands, to make them more plain...” Jefferson, *Notes on Early Career*

superior to the objects of mathematics... and it *is* divine.”⁸ Should we be too proud to acknowledge that the progress of mankind’s art, erudition, technology, and well-being will either be divine, that is, supermathematical, or it will not be? And if not, then we either return to the dry well of logic, or else it will not be progress. Hence a need for the advocacy of the acceleration of our ascendancy from an over-dependance on logic, so we will forgive ourselves for being attached to a schema which is already in the process of being eclipsed, because logic must soon be once again rightfully treated merely as one tool among many in service to understanding and knowledge—as a trade in which select apprentices might labor, such as woodworking or motherhood.

How pleasant it would be if we could take other men’s theories for granted, and yet we unhesitatingly embrace what others call “logic” and their tortured manipulations of reason. What passes for intelligence is often nothing more than tentative agreements of convenience. What defunct curiosity is displayed in the student’s unchallenging embrace of the fundamentals of mathematics! We have unskeptically believed Euclid, but few have had the intellectual courage to think with him. Based on his inventions, we have developed the internet, so why should “the line” be doubted?⁹ There remains a

⁸ *Metaphysics*

⁹ “1) A straight line may be drawn between any two points, and 2) Any terminated straight line may be extended indefinitely.” Euclid, “Axioms”

deficiency in man’s capacity for the sincere pursuit of truth while, unlike Jacob, we refuse to wrestle with the angel. What benefit do we have of Euclid’s axioms and postulates if Plato is correct in saying in *The Republic* that “the objects of geometrical knowledge are eternal...[but] useful if, *and only if*, it compels us to contemplate reality [the form of the good]” [emphasis added]. The modern student’s study of even the most basic elements of mathematics is rarely if ever for the sake of being compelled “to contemplate reality,” but is instead aimed at the production and improvement of commercial technology—artificial intelligence. The result is an artificial intelligence in the student reduced to a utilitarian calculator who produces technology for the sake of technology and encounters the breathing texts of Euclid, Newton, and Einstein and extracts only a profitable formula.

Are we not too logical? While it may be true that “the book of nature is written in the language of mathematics,”¹⁰ and that our rationalist age of bureaucratic “sophisters, economists, and calculators”¹¹ has taken primacy in government and management, these institutions are on shifting sands in the book of mankind, as Dixsaut puts it, “the cheerfulness requires

¹⁰ Galileo, *The Assayer, The Assayer*, 1623

¹¹ “The Age of Chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever.” Burke, *Reflections*

that spirit emancipate itself from the errors of reason”¹² (not the errors of miscalculations, but those inherent to rationality). We have heard it said that theology—the logic of God—is the chief science—the ultimate method of reason for attaining understanding—because God, the theologian asserts, is logos, that is, the Word, and indeed that “the Word was God,” but God is many things. How disappointing would it be if on the Last Day the heavens depart like a scroll and a mathematical proof descends to meet us, as if Christ were a halmos¹³ or a checkmating pattern.

Theology is a branch of philosophy—the divine science, as Aristotle called it— but for a more accurate delineation, it is *only* that about God which can be apprehended by science or reason, which may pale to that which is apprehensible by another way of knowing—faith is a contender. As Aquinas says, “the human is ordered to God as to a certain end that exceeds the comprehension of reason.”¹⁴ Indeed, Aquinas qualified “theology,” though acknowledging its potential as metaphysics or the “principal cause,” (he did take pains for a “summary of theology”) in favor of “*sacra doctrina*” as more transcendent—a “higher teaching, which proceeds by way of revelation.” What distinguishes Aquinas’s *sacra doctrina* from classical theology was, as Harkins says, both its content and pedagogical mode: “the manner according to which God delivers certain

¹² *Plato-Nietzsche: Philosophy the Other Way*

¹³ The square symbol marking the end of a proof

truths to [man]...namely divine revelation.” This is to say that a delineation of theology is far from unprecedented, but more importantly that a sober and moderate relationship to logic concerning God and nature is perhaps far away from us today.

By the same error—the modern undue exaltation of theology, which the ancients had properly classified—it is popularly claimed that love, in the hierarchization of the essences of the Being of God, is the chiefest, “for God is love,” but could we stomach a mode of reason based on the essence of God’s Being a man of war? the consuming fire? the everlasting burning? I do not see why one is preferred over the rest: logic, love, terror. “The fear of the Lord”, after all, “is the beginning of wisdom.” The simplest rebuttal to the self-exultant theologian—the Pharisee—is theophilia—the love of God—which was Christ’s reply to those who thought that in the scriptures [alone] they had life—(“the love of God is not in you[, theologian]”). No, put aside these contentiously stratified essential characteristics of God and observe the fundamental essence of the Deity: “I Am That I Am,” i.e. God *Is* That He *Is*. God—Being—the One who exists—God *is*—the principal assertion—who positively defines both himself and the world (we do not say Earth) from that position, and who possesses the exclusive right to do so as Being. (“Define,” we say, and not “interpret,” as Heidegger would have it, more on this later.)

¹⁴ See Harkins’ *Thomas Aquinas*

Plato described an understanding superior to reason known as *noesis* or intelligence, which “[pursues] its inquiry solely by and through forms themselves,” whereas reason, as in mathematics (“what are called ‘sciences’”), “uses the originals of the visible order [(the physical world)] in their turn as images, and has to base its inquiries on assumptions and proceed from them *not to a first principle* but to a conclusion.” What is at issue here is not epistemology, but an examination of the unintelligibility of the hyper-reasonableness of existentialist logic which subjugates intelligence to reason. Rationalism’s exaltation of logic as the fundamental essence of humanity has at once led to and been problematized by the advent of the computer—a technology which logicizes. The culmination of computation is artificial intelligence—an advent which has reopened a skepticism of technology itself. The technological skeptics, in the ludditical line of Socrates who interrogated “writing”¹⁵ as the disassociation of memory and communication from humanity—in a sense, the exportation of uniquely human essences (indeed, Socrates did not write)—feeling threatened by the computer, formulate that the progression of technology is the essential reduction of humanity. What is technology but the assertion of the nature of man onto worldly objects? And what is artificial intelligence but synthetic thinking? Without splitting hairs concerning the phenomenal definitions of “thinking” and “synthetic”, and although mathematicians and computer scientists would

¹⁵ See Plato’s *Phaedrus*

separate “conceptual thinking” (uniquely human, they claim) from “analytical thinking” (an essence of humanity which we have materialized in the computer), A.I.’s ability to compute via logic by analyzing patterns in the significance of symbols is essentially human. This invention is a challenge at once both to Descartes’ “thinking” as the fundamental human essence which suffices “being” (“I think therefore I am”) and the Rationalists’ logic (Aristotelean reason does not escape this conundrum), because despite computers, humans have not ceased *to be*. Technology is not the reduction of the human essence, it is at worst its exportation, or more benignly, its materialization; one may speculate that technologization, or creativity, is the fundamental human essence and thereby avoid those fears. Besides, the luddites (including Socrates) in their skepticism of computers and artificial intelligence would have to regress even beyond writing in their stifling of technology back to shelter, the fishing pole, and fire—the original technology—and rechain Prometheus to a tree to have his liver perpetually plucked by the proud vulture of primitivism.

Theology is the logic of God, but who will claim that the “spiritual things” can be understood logically? (“They are spiritually discerned.”) As Harkin’s writes, “Aquinas’s most important and enduring intellectual contribution may well be his showing that faith and reason are complementary modes of apprehending reality.” And while it is true that we have the mind of Christ, would it

not be obtuse to say that God's mind can be understood entirely through logic? And if not God's mind, why not all things? Here is the question that we are now faced with: what is it besides logic that is chiefly determinant of knowledge and mankind, if it is true, as Aristotle says, that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts"? The answer, as we have previously said, and which the ancients understood, is Being.

The Birth of Existentialism

What Aristotle called "the science of being insofar as it is being, and also the properties of being in its own right," i.e. "the highest causes," and "the first or primary philosophy" has since been dubbed "metaphysics." Some would dub Aristotelean ontology "theological" because, as Clodius Piat says, "God is the metaphysician *par excellence*, and also the supreme object of metaphysics,"¹⁶ but this is not how the science has developed. Modernists treat Being in the universal, neutered sense such that entities *exist*, which is to say that everything that *is* partakes of the essence of Being—a property that used to be taxonomized in the context of the divine nature if not the "first cause," i.e. the "Being qua being of God" was the template and cornerstone for treating with Being generally—the backbone of metaphysics or ontology. Part of Heidegger's project was to distinguish the activity of Being (and describing it as such) from the objective condition of mere existence, and

¹⁶ *Aristote*

as an activity peculiar at least to mankind. Hans v Arnim attempts to attach further necessities to the highest form or quintessence of Being—"independence, self-subsistence, eternity, and immobility"—as properties which cannot belong to man, and thus relegates man's Being as a "secondary type."¹⁷ This post-modernist, anti-classical, de-universalization of ontology is the severance of God from man and obliteration of heroism which conveniently unaccommodates Jesus Christ ("before Abraham was, I Am")—the "second Adam"—the new creation, but the modern metaphysician goes further, as we shall see, in constructing an ardently atheistic ontology. The construction (it is a deconstruction) of a metaphysics divorced from God is destined for futility, as Newton says, "much concerning God; to discourse of whom from the appearances of things, does certainly belong to Natural Philosophy." So much for the classicists.

The modernist, anti-traditional, inverted Platonic ontology, in its search to elucidate an understanding of Being qua being, such that it is descriptive of the beingness—existence—of all beings, i.e. of God, man, ideas, sensual objects, etc., inescapably self-restrained by the phenomenological, natural world, has done nothing but slander the omnipotent and eternal beingness of God with a description thought to bridge the gap between fallen man and deity, which amounts to a "being" whose action is at best mere subjectivity, e.g.

¹⁷ *Wien. Stud.*, XLVI (1928)

semiotics, and at worst witchcraft—manipulation: pseudo-spiritually of the physical elements, e.g. alchemy, or psychologically, e.g. hypnosis. The ringleaders of this ontological deconstruction are the twentieth century brave-new-idols of post-philosophic existentialism: Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Plato and Aristotle opened the door into an interrogation of Being as such, or "being qua being" as "the principle science" or "the first cause." But why is the question of Being considered the cornerstone of metaphysics and fundamental (or highest) object of study? Heidegger calls the science of being—ontology—the "a priori enigma" because "being is 'always already' operative in what we do and think", i.e. we are constantly Being and acknowledging other entities' "beingness." As Aristotle acknowledges, we are always uncritically using the words "being", "to be", and its conjugates—"am, is, are, was, were"—without critically interrogating its meaning. What does it mean "to be?" Consider the phrase, "the sky is blue." While other "lower" sciences are concerned about the blueness of the sky, like chemistry, or the sky itself, like meteorology, metaphysicians are interested in the copula—"is"—which the other scientists are allowed to take for granted. The question of Being is further problematized, or made even more enigmatic, when the subject of Being is oneself: "I am" e.g. "I am happy." A Pandora's box is

¹⁸ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

¹⁹ *Transcendence of the Ego*

opened when we consider that by acknowledging "ourselves" we are creating a division, as Nietzsche says, "I and me are always too deep in conversation."¹⁸ Again, as Sartre says, "the 'self' doing the reflecting is not the same as the 'self' being reflected upon."¹⁹ The constructed self (me) is an object of reflection while the true self (the subconscious "I") is the Being engaged in consciousness, and this delineation is ripe for abuse.

What is Being? This is *the* philosophic question, and its mistreatment carries consequences for all lower sciences. For Heidegger, the concept of "being" is what is taken most for granted—completely obvious—the proverbial sea in which we swim or the forest whose trees the lower sciences study. Heidegger's ontology, like Sartre's and unlike Plato's, de-anthropocentrizes, that is, removes man's Being from the primacy of existence and role in the cosmos by equalizing the world's role in being. The post-Nietzschean theories of Being subjugate man by turning the phenomenon of existence into one which necessitates an extra-human reality—truth or reality apart from man. Being as treated by modernists is merely a "mental experience"—a "comportment" of the self "which directs toward matter"—where "matter" is "what is seen or the appearing of what appears."²⁰ Within this last definition is the crux of the difference between Aristotle and Plato's metaphysics and the modern inversion of philosophical idealism: the

²⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*

placement of world posterior to man—the putting of the cart before the horse. The modern existential man is an interpreter of the universal, pre-existent world, and Being is the phenomenal action which occurs by man in his experiencing the world, which is merely “the perceived thing.”

At its core, Heidegger's metaphysics of Being is an anti-spiritual reduction of man from godlikeness to the station of earthly animal whose essential nature is that of observer which obviates his transcendent power over his world—creative potential—faith—and substitutes it with the Trojan horse of mere interpretation. This quasi-naturalism of atheistic, post-modern existentialism when taken to its logical origin leads to the scientivistic absurdity of nihilism²¹ which is not even appropriate to describe the first Adam's prerogative as earthly interpreter of a pre-existent world, much less the spiritual “second Adam.” Heidegger's phenomenology is adequate for the neutered Being of a godless, carnal humanity—the brute logician—but it is an embarrassment to the Being of Deity, of whose likeness we are to inhabit through Christ. Without simply advocating for a resurgence of the neoplatonism against which Heidegger fought, whose project was explicitly

²¹ Mansfield in *Manliness* partly connotes manliness with the Nietzschean approach to nihilism, that is, the inessentiality of natural entities with man as the assertive arbiter of definition—ascribing significance to objects. With the Nietzschean conception of nihilism is the understanding of man as *Übermensch*—his own god having killed both the old idols and God himself. There are several assumptions behind this framework, chiefly Nietzsche's misinterpretation of Christianity, or perhaps more accurately, his

anti-traditional and pro-radical, let us acknowledge that an ontological method which accommodates the Eternal has no harbor in Heideggerianism. Heidegger did his best to avoid a naturalistic understanding of Being with a subjectivist semiotics by hypothesizing that man imparts himself into his world hermeneutically while simultaneously trying to uphold what he supposes is a transcendental subject which accesses a subjugated yet universal, true formal realm through Husserl's “categorical intuition.” These gymnastics read like a conflicted man who came to an atheistic conclusion vainly attempting to wiggle out of the darkness of the void through a naturalistic methodology. Schurmann criticizes this analysis as forcing Heidegger into the pessimistic nihilism of the inter-war-years' attitude,²² but how can it be otherwise in a philosophy which roots itself in the existential subject's descriptive emergence from and grounding in the “everyday” natural world? Schurmann also points out that it is this analysis which Sartre uncritically carries to its nihilistic extreme in *Being and Nothingness*.

Sartre's ontological project—nihilistic existentialism *par excellence*—sought the obliteration of all idealism—Plato's forms—by reducing reality and Being to a) consciousness and b) brute existence. Continuing with

analysis of the errant form of the popular European “Christianity” of his day. As Riisager says of critics who accuse Machiavelli of anti-Christianity: “It is therefore too hasty to conclude with Strauss and Mansfield that Machiavelli wholly dismisses the Christian faith as contributing to indolence and an effeminate cowardice. It is its interpreters who have done it harm—and indeed ‘disarmed’ heaven.”

²² See Critchley and Schurmann's *On Heidegger's Being and Time*

Husserl's distinction between essence and existence and taking up the mantle of Heidegger's hermeneutics, for Sartre no entity has an inherent essence, but a mere existence, i.e. all things, even humanity, exist without meaning or essence; only by man does the world become meaningful. This bedrock logic leads Sartre to an exaltation of "nothingness"—that which does not exist—and leads him to nihilistic, atheistic platitudes such as, "man is the being who is what he is not"—the anti-being—and "I entrust myself to the inanimate"—becoming the objectified victim of the void (more on this later). Sartre reaches these positions through tenuous syllogisms, though not altogether illogical according to the Heideggerian phenomenological framework. Arriving at the conclusion that consciousness is a "concrete nothingness," Sartre inadvertently outlines the characteristics of Nietzsche's "last man"—a passive nihilist who is defined by the reality of his environment in complete arbitrariness. The Nothingness of Sartre's existential, conscious subject leaves him vulnerable to being objectified by the world and impotent of creativity. Only with a willful self-determination can Sartre's "last man" merely *color* his world within the strict confines which the brutal existence of sensuous objects may permit him; he is a lethargic perceiver who accepts only what is given to him and if he has the temerity to dare to have an idea about a thing, then he is deceiving himself. Sartre's conscious subject of Nothingness is only because the existence of some pre-existent, sensual object permits him *to be*.

Sartre's hypothesis unapologetically does not account for the eternal Being of the Deity, who was before

anything else existed, and of Whose Being we partake. God had nothing to perceive—nothing of which to be conscious—but nevertheless existed. God's consciousness could not have been "nothingness" nor uncolored by inherent essences, which is to say that true Being, though the first cause, carries necessary properties (more on this later). In fact, this is Sartre's proof that there is no god. The act of creating, or bringing into existence, implies a conscious Being not of mere perception of pre-existent objects, but of the imposition of essence, which is itself existence. The nature of God is existence, *to be* ("I Am"), and the consciousness of God is an action which creates via definition (the Word). God is pre-existent creator of worlds, not the interpreter of pre-existent worlds, thus Heidegger and Sartre's description of Being is inadequate. Logic can easily take one into the nihilistic realm of existentialism when one removes the cornerstone of reality from the equation—understanding Being without having to accommodate the Beingness of God—this is a fair imputation on Heidegger and Sartre who begin from faulty assumptions, namely atheism. An atheistic ontology can purport, as Sartre's does, that reality exists independently of the conscious subject—more specifically, his Being—but a theistic ontology cannot.

What are the consequences of existentialism? It has completely severed humanity from the possibility of even having an essence and thereby annihilated humanity as inessential—nothing. How did they get there? Start with the hypothesis that Being is the fundamental essence of humanity, and indeed of God, but this is redundant (humanity is in the image of God, and Aristotle

understood the necessity of creating an ontology which recognizes the co-participation of God and man in Being). Heidegger sought to desert Platonism with an attempt at an anti-metaphysics while working with the building blocks of the rubble of Nietzsche's demolition. Heidegger bridged the gap between "I" and "me"—unifying the subject, "I," (humanity) with the essential, "being," to create "Dasein"—the being (verb) which knows itself as such, i.e. the being which *is*. So what? Granted, although Heidegger effectively invigorated Being with atheistic naturalness—the thing which all carnal men must inherit—he put the issue in its proper status as the central and ultimate phenomenon and question of philosophy—the primary philosophy of first principles, thus allowing philosophy to "raise anew the question of the meaning of being as its fundamental matter",²³ as if to recover Nietzsche's intentional fumble, but it should never have been otherwise, because this principal philosophical dilemma is seen in perhaps the first man to have interrogated Being when Moses encountered "I Am." As Kirk writes, "Moses perceived the nature of being through some means beyond the limits of human rationality."²⁴ And what was Sartre's, the father of existentialism's, great feat? He attempted to put a wedge between the subject and activity—to separate "I" from "am", but in positing "I / Am," Sartre annihilated "self."

²³ *On Heidegger's Being and Time*

²⁴ *The Roots of American Order*

Heidegger and Sartre's existentialism, rooted in Darwin's anti-transcendental reduction of man to servant of species and object of the world, postulates that reality is a matter of interpretation or observation, that there is objectivity in ideals, i.e. that there is an extra-human, existential essence of the natural universe, which presupposes 1) the world and its constitutive entities are at worst independent of man and Being, and at best interdependent, and 2) objects possess an inherent, natural quintessence even if that object is subjectively interpreted, and even if that essence is Nothingness. Although they understand the separation or uniqueness of "self" and "self-consciousness" over or distinguished from the world, they still relegate the definition of subject and reality to... absurdity or the void—what they call "nothingness"—the attention of the subject infolds like an insatiable cannibal excreting self-doubt. The separation of the existent subject from the objective world is a start, but leaving that subject in the atheistic limbo of futility is the great sin of modernism. In the arena of the cosmos, Heidegger and Sartre's existentialism encounters Nothingness, and Nothingness prevails. Absurdity. Owens says that the "path floodlighted by the *Metaphysics* [is that] the nature of being has to be a being."²⁵ We will go further: the nature of a being *is* Being. We will place the existent subject within his proper godlike status—a reanthropocentrization—not in the

²⁵ *Aristotle's Gradations of Being in Metaphysics*

nihilistic “nothing” as Heidegger and Sartre do, but in God as Being—as Creator of World—as Hero.

Nihilism

Explorations into the phenomena of Being, entity, and essence are ancient; the zealous willingness to describe and wrestle with their absences or negations are newer. One might assume it requires a sort of atheistic stalwartness to seriously posit Nothingness and non-being, but this is not wholly original to Sartre. Nietzsche considered himself the foremost nihilist in Europe—not because he believed in its veracity, but quite the opposite: he “prophesied” that what he experienced as the emergence of a nihilistic modernity beginning with Socrates and articulated by Machiavelli would erupt into a global, all-consuming (all-deconstructive) political force, and thus needed to be dealt with, and Sartre is its

²⁶ “The Buddhistic feature: a yearning for nonentity... the will to destruction as the will of a still deeper instinct—of the instinct of self-destruction, of the Will to Nonentity... A road to nonentity is the desideratum... he rushes into nonentity, absurdity, valuelessness, childishness... ideals have really been the power which has most slandered man and power, the poisonous fumes which have hung over reality, and which have seduced men to yearn for nonentity....” Nietzsche, *Will to Power*

²⁷ In *On Being and Essence*, St. Thomas famously concludes that there is only one being, the prime mover, God, who has its self-subsistent essence in his own existence, that is, he whose essence and existence are the same thing, and this uniqueness precludes human beings, as in, by his conception, bipartite creatures temporally divided between soul and body but who will eventually realize the unity of the knowledge of God in the next life through the

culmination. Nihilistic modernity’s fruit of political, pessimistic antagonism—the philosophical, wholesale embrace of Nothingness as reality,²⁶ and thus the proactive attack on what-*is*—is the object of our criticism, and heroism is its solution.

First, a survey of the cornerstone, ancient ontologies; In *On Being And Essence*,²⁷ Thomas Aquinas treats with the linguistic-logical function of Being as a predicate for substances, forms, and matter according to Aristotle’s categories in *The Metaphysics* such that Being defines substances or objects according to two broad categories: necessary and accidental, where in the verb “to be” when predicating a necessary definition of an object connotes an essence of that object, but an accidental definition is transient. (Essence originates from the Latin root *esse* which is the infinitive of being—“to be.”) For example, when we say that “Socrates is

“light of his glory.” Aquinas does not recognize the godlikeness of humanity at least in this way, perhaps separating “created” and “creator,” where God is the only pre-existent being. Perhaps he was due for an acknowledgement of the gravity of the spiritual rebirth and man’s participation in Christ, but there is no time nor inclination on behalf of the author to here rebut the structural, logical lineage which leads Thomas to this conclusion, however this point is important in our discussion of Being and heroism which we will further develop later. Where Thomas and I do agree, but which Anthony Kenny in *Aquinas on Being* calls absurd and my extension of it to “the hero,” is that pure existence can be the fundamental and principal essence of an entity. St. Thomas limits this phenomenon to God—“I am that I am,”—but I extend it to Being—to the hero through Christ.

human,” we understand humanity to be a necessary aspect of Socrates—humanity is essential to Socrates—humanity is an essence—whereas if we say that “Socrates is fat,” then this is only an accidental modifier and not essential to Socrates, because Socrates may lose weight and still retain that which necessarily defines him. *On Being And Essence* also treats with epistemology—between the active and receptive aspects of the intellect, between universal and individual knowable objects, between simple and compound substances, actualities and potentialities, substantial and accidental changes, and between essence and existence. So much for the linguistic-logical concepts of Being themselves—the nebbish variety of ontological treatises absent of explicit theology or socio-politics, although there is every trickle-down implication for the latter fields in the ontologies presented by Aristotle and Aquinas.

In these texts we find the dormant seeds of nihilism; Aquinas treats of the absurdities inherent in the “negation” or the “being of the non-existent” using the example of “there is blindness in the eye.” Being here—the copula “is”—is describing something which does not exist—an absence, a Nothingness pertaining to the eye, namely the absence of sight. Does it make sense, Aquinas says, to positively define Nothingness? No, but this is the style or mode of deconstructive anarchic-utopianists—nihilists—a linguistic charade or shell game

of Being, because “utopia” is necessarily non-existent (from the Greek: *ou-* meaning “not,” and *-topos* meaning “place”—literally, “not a place”) and the logic of nihilistic existentialism is predicated on this essentiality of non-existence—Nothingness—or non-existent essence—of the void—a paradox erroneously articulated by Sartre as we will later investigate.

It is only a consequence of the knowledge of good and evil that a degenerate human, that is, one incognizant of his own Being (godlikeness, or participation in the essence or nature of the Deity) and of the Being of God, would require a negative definition of God to understand His essence; i.e. it becomes absurd to say that “God *is not*,” e.g. that “God *is not* evil”—“I Am Not That I Am Not?” Similarly, it was not the case in the beginning that God commanded, “let there *not be* darkness.” Could we imagine that this *will-not-to-be* could have produced light? i.e. what *is*? Likewise, can we imagine that “faith *is not* the substance of things *not hoped for*?” Absurdity, but “I am not” is the mode of the antagonist—the nihilist, non-entity—anti-being.

Sartre’s antiplatonic insistence on reality as sensuality and attempted abolition of the ideal or categorical-as-transcendent leads him to a problematic description of Nothingness and non-being. For Sartre, “nonbeing is an element of the real”, as Catalano notes,²⁸ i.e. Nothingness is a positive element of human reality—that “nothingness” exists. Again, this is a valid logical

²⁸ *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness*

conclusion, but only within an atheistic framework which stems from the conscious (nihilistic) subject's total emersion in the void; "Being" defined by the non-essential world's mere "brute existence" imparts the definition of Nothingness onto the un-heroic subject, as it does for Sartre, and therefore Nothingness and non-being cannot be separated from reality nor conceived as something essentially different from Being and creation. Heidegger, who famously defines anxiety as fear of [...]—nothing or the nonexistent—manages to describe non-being according to its proper phenomenological category of Void, or at least manages to dodge the question as unwilling to play the cards of atheism, whereas Sartre, committed to the sensuous unideal, logicizes to a concrete or real Nothingness, as if to justify "dread"—anxiety and absence. One cannot give too much credit to Sartre's reasoning, however, as he operates within the framework which vehemently and unapologetically begins with the assumption of godlessness and non-creation, which allows itself to ignore the counter-factual of God's pre-existence of all things, for then "nothing" as a concrete reality would have pre-existed God, instead of the truth of "nothing" belonging to the void as [...], as we rightfully say, "nothing pre-existed God," or "[...] is pre-existent." To go further in demonstrating the impropriety of Sartre's misclassification of Nothingness as an aspect of reality,

²⁹ "[The dialectic process] is a new concept but one higher and richer than the preceding—richer because it negates or opposes the preceding and therefore contains it, and it contains even more than

observe that the Being of all things consists in and is upheld by the Being of the conscious subject, ergo Nothingness and absence are only those things which are not realized in the world by Being—all things which *are not* belong to the void, because they do not belong to the world of the hero. Thus, we have non-being—the condition of nothing or absence—as the essence of that-which-is-not—the nonexistent-world or the void; not as a positive condition of a created world by a pessimistic nihilist (as Sartre would have it), but as the essence of non-existence.

Here is a parallel in two philosophical comparisons: Hegel and Plato; Heidegger and Sartre. Hegel attempted to cure the Socratic method of its nihilism—its *reductio ad absurdum*—by inventing a new logic. As Dixsaut writes, "Socrates claims not only that he knows nothing but that he *is* nothing—another manner of avoiding being a subject, and this 'nothing' is corrosive", which is fundamental to Hegel's dialectics. Whereas Socrates—the Olympian of Sophistry who negated into oblivion—required that all premises once "disproven" be abandoned, Hegel asserted that they could be progressively salvaged without loss by being "sublimated" into newer and newer definitions.²⁹ Like Heidegger to Sartre, this is a somewhat preferable approach because it maintains the possibility of existence, but it is merely a possible, inessential

that, for it is the unity of itself and its opposite." (SL-dG 33; cf. SL-M 54)

existence which infamously necessitates the exchange of Being for “becoming,” for then the only Being (truth) would exist at an unapproachable infinity—God. The same abusive relationship exists between Heidegger and Sartre (although Heidegger’s magnum opus *Being and Time* was published before Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*); Sartre magnifies the innocuous errors of Heidegger’s ontology by taking them to their extremes. The (de)contribution of these phenomenologists to ontology is their false humility in refusing to prescribe definitions or syllogize with metaphysical and spiritual assumptions, and instead to meekly describe phenomenal appearances, all akin to Nietzsche’s critique on Plato’s propagandizing political theory: “Plato preferred ‘appearing’ to ‘being’: and thus lie, fiction to truth, and unreal to existent.”³⁰

Modernism

The origins of our nihilistic, existential modernism can be traced back from figures like Machiavelli and Shakespeare (more on this later) to its 20th century eruption. The shift away from the classics and progress-as-improvement—reform over revolution, or the building

³⁰ Nietzsche KSA 12 7[2]

³¹ “The new empresarios on the vanguard of history... Thus arose the modernist establishment; the self-contained circle of critics who form the backbone of our cultural institutions who trade in originality, transgression, and breaking new paths.” Roger Scruton, “Point of View: Art Today.”

upon the classical foundation in a teleologically linear chronology—towards an exaltation of human reason, progress as arbitrary change for the sake of change, the individualistic radicalism of Nothingness, and absurdity as a reaction against tradition is, in short, modernism. In art, heralded by Ralph Waldo Emerson and articulated by Ezra Pound’s “make it new,” modernism—the belief in so-called progress—is intrinsically a reaction *against*—a distinguishing *from*—a departure *away*—a non-being.³¹ Modernism opposes the eternal and ideal. Philosophically, Mansfield famously places Machiavelli as the instigator of modernity because, as Riisager says, “Machiavelli’s project is a denial of human limitations” and “a call to mastery” (which is antithetical to postmodernism, but more on this later).³² Shakespeare, the self-proclaimed “modern”³³ poet, and Machiavellian par excellence, follows hot on his heels. What was Machiavelli’s project except a reaction against Aristotle’s virtue = happiness? Nietzsche was equipped to sardonically rigorize the attack against Plato as a philologist, and although Nietzsche is nothing if not layered, his writing is quintessentially antagonistic³⁴ if only on its surface, as he himself says, “perhaps this old Plato is my true great *adversary*?”³⁵ The aesthetic of modernist art and the logic of modernist philosophy is

³² *History, Comedy and Tragedy: Machiavelli and the Renaissance of Ancient Virtue in the Christian World*

³³ “How far a modern quill doth come too short, / Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth grow.” Sonnet 83

³⁴ “What business is it of mine to refute!” Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*

³⁵ Letter from Nietzsche to Paul Deussen, Nice (France), November 16, 1887

therefore the deconstructive antagonism of nihilistic pessimism—as Nietzsche sardonically declares: God is dead, “nothing is true; everything is permitted.”³⁶ In the modernist’s espousal of “newness,” he decries, “not that!” against all existence—that-which-*is*. Socialism represents this modernist antagonism with its anti-capitalistic, perpetually revolutionary doctrine, such as Mao’s project to destroy the “Four Olds”: old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits.³⁷ The modernist’s prerogative is to produce that-which-is-not, and he therefore arrives at a conception of identity based upon difference—the conglomerated soul of the non-being (more on this later). The post-modernism of Sartre’s *Nothingness* and existential nausea and Heidegger’s meaning-as-interpretation are both rooted in the modernist logos, and the end is a reactionism rooted in sensuality—the infamous “lived experience.” This sensual reactionism (stemming from modernism) underscores the absurdification on behalf of the alleged total subjectivity of individualistic interpretations of emersion in everyday culture which is indeed the substantial goal of modernist art—the polis and its culture are objects of scorn of which to make jokes, and the narrator is the godless non-being who is destined for futility (see Shakespeare and Mark Twain, whom we shall discuss in depth later). This everyday absurdification and fascination with the individualistic interpretation of at-hand sensuality accounts for the modernist concern with pop-culture and colloquialisms,

³⁶ *The Genealogy of Morals*

³⁷ See “The Four Olds” or “The Cultural Revolution”

also tenets of Shakespeare and Twain. The most hyperbolic modernist antagonism is “dadaism”—conglomerated, deconstructive, pessimistic decadence par excellence. Baym explicitly connects modernism to Sartre,³⁸ although Eliot’s “The Wasteland”—the archetypal modernist work—appeared almost twenty years before *Being and Nothingness*: “the modernist sense [is] that ‘truth’ does not exist objectively but is the product of the mind’s interaction with reality.” Modernism’s non-beingness or antagonism is also seen in the proliferation of manifestos, which are characterized by hostility, demolition, revolt, and “us vs them” dichotomies, as Marinetti writes in his “Manifesto on Futurism”: “We will destroy museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice.” Modernism’s *am-not* and *will-not* places it squarely in the realm of absurdity, leaves it captured by the nonexistence of the void and therefore fragmented, is perpetually aggrieved, explicitly and self-proclaimed villainous in its aim of undermining existence, and atheistic—modernist = pessimistic, nihilistic, antagonistic anti-being.

The movement known as “postmodernism” goes further; discontent with all totalities or “unary adumbrations” as Judy puts it,³⁹ postmodernists—post-Nietzscheans—declare the “death of philosophy” and resist all first causes, ends, and monoliths. As Sheehan puts it, “postmodernism has performed a comprehensive

³⁸ *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Shorter 8th Edition.

³⁹ *Sentient Flesh: Thinking in Disorder, Poesis in Black*

demolition job on all western orthodoxies... driven by the urge to find new ways of resisting [the confines of metaphysical logic]."⁴⁰ Even Sartre's "conscious subject of nothingness" goes too far in the way of empowering man's sovereignty for postmodernists. We have criticized Heidegger and Sartre's subjective "meaning-as-interpretation" for failing to accommodate God or the heroic pre-existent "creator" in an account of being, but at least these two anti-philosophers ascribe the creation of meaning to man via language; for postmodernists, man presupposes language and meaning, i.e. they relegate man even further into the void. Postmodernists condemn even the deconstructive conglomeration of dadaism for insinuating that man has any potential for creation—even if it is a decreation. These obliterated in the line of Darwin, such as Foucault, herald "accidental" man's total "liquidation" and disillusion from any concept of him having an "immortal soul".⁴¹ The logic here is indeed bulletproof, but only if your assumption is infidelity. In the end, Sartre and Foucault arrive at the same conclusions: Nothingness and absurdity, but modernists, even in their existential nausea and atheistic rage, are still willing to attempt to retain some of the dignity of manhood: subjectivity, interpretation, and meaning, that is, they still believe that they can work with the ashes of their deconstructed reality. An easy contrast can be seen in modernists' promulgation of manifestos, something postmodernists would decry as presumptuously authoritative, universal

⁴⁰ *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*

⁴¹ See Longford's *Michael Foucault and the Death of Man: Toward a Posthumanist 'Critical Ontology of Ourselves'*

"metanarratives," which they reject, despite that manifestos themselves are also characteristically antagonistic. For postmodernists, "to will" becomes a dangerous pretense for man's sovereignty over the world—the root of modernist tyrannies who believe they can solve and master the universe and politics—and carries an assumption of a hierarchy of reality with man on top—godliness. Like all antagonistic, non-being villains, postmodernists see man not as the subject over a world, but an object of the void where anyone who purports to *be*—exist, create, or define—is a narcissistic relic of a dead philosophical tradition. Postmodernism's perpetual deconstruction of humanity as man—godlike master of world—hero—sovereign image of the Deity—is antagonism—a resistance—villainy—a non-being. Thus, with the rejection of all absolutes—including Nothingness—they are left with, as Sheehan says, a never-ending yet always immediate "[becoming] that aims to unleash a force of pure transgression, to realize a permanent revolution in social relations." Whereas modernists envision a negatively defined epistemology deconstructed from the real—however "the real" may be conceived—postmodernism inhabits a virtual void where all meaning is obliterated at the atomic level, but the attitude of both movements is resistance—"am not." As Halperin says, the oppositionally defiant identity against norms and expectations is the definition of "queer."⁴² Indeed, every theory which has its roots in modernism stems from the same underlying anti-philosophy of non-

⁴² *Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography*

being. Take feminism as an example: “antitraditional,” modernist feminism is a resistance to femininity—a normal vector away from traditional (natural) womanliness which amounts to a masculinization of the female—while postmodern feminism rejects all signification and symbolism surrounding gender writ large to produce a non-gendered, nonexistent cyborg—a hybrid of all things (male/female/natural/technological), non-things—the undefined—and potential things—the definable. Both philosophies—the one an anti-philosophy and the other a walking-dead-philosophy raised from an autocannibalised corpse—belong to the absurd—the void—and we include both within our references to the modern—the contemporary—but also a convenient abbreviation subsuming postmodernism into modernism as the dominant thought in American universities and media.

Riisager characterizes postmodernism as the “Heideggerian triumph of the gods over reason”—what James Lindsay identifies as scientific Gnosticism—a “remaking [of the world] into a world that is not and... cannot be.”⁴³ These postmodern “gnostics” understand reality to be a prison governed by a tyrannical God, and their goal is a liberation from the injustice of existence by the dismantlement of all constructed orders, including language and meaning; the result is a theoretical utopia which is characteristically non-existent, i.e. “is not *this*.” This attitude of Gnosticism finds support in Heidegger’s phenomenological approach which resists both definitions and causes while limiting itself to mere

⁴³ “The Calamity of Scientific Gnosticism”

“appearances”—phenomenology. The post-modern gnostic error— “the triumph of the gods over reason”— is akin to Leibniz’s slanderous misinterpretation of Newton’s theory—gravity-as-animism—as he writes in critique of *The Principium*, “It ought not to be said, that the Universe is like an Animal endued with Life and Intelligence.”⁴⁴ Linking animism, Gnosticism, postmodernism, and Heideggerianism is the alleged unknowability of an irrational and mysterious yet ever present unjust god, and the beginning of this great deconstruction—the divestment of humanity from the gods and their false reality—is the phenomenological taxonomy of brute existence which was ultimately crystallized by Sartre. Phenomenology is an appropriate method for the atheist who, having no confidence in truth or even logic, is confined solely to his senses to merely describe the appearance of a thing’s brute existence. Phenomenology’s resistance to teleology leaves its science frozen in time and constrained to a longitudinal structure of investigation whereby the phenomenon in question is subject to a repeated process of isolations where every constitutive element of the thing is deconstructed and described which amounts in the end to an autocannibalism until every atom and grouping is divested of all significance—until the object is thoroughly proven to be *absurd*. This is the nihilistic, antagonistic tendency of postmodernism = technocracy = existentialism.

⁴⁴ Letter to Hartsoeker, Published in *Memoirs of Literature*, Hanover, 10 February 1711

Antagonist: The Deconstructor

They have a power given to them, like that of the evil principle, to subvert and destroy, but none to construct, except such machines as may be fitted for further subversion and further destruction.

Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France

The poorest way to face life is to face it with a sneer. There are many men who feel a kind of twisted pride in cynicism; there are men who confine themselves to criticism of the way others do what they themselves dare not even attempt.

There is no more unhealthy being, no man less worthy of respect, than he who either really holds, or feigns to hold, an attitude of sneering disbelief toward all that is great and lofty.

Theodore Roosevelt⁴⁵

The same men who make the mistake of taking Nietzsche literally are given to the opposite error toward Emerson: they are unwilling to read him on his face. Emerson, though not a metaphysician, was a nineteenth century American critic and anti-patriot (insofar as he worked the dissolution of the possibility of a positive American national identity). In Emerson's zeal for the

⁴⁵ From his speech in Paris on April 23, 1910, titled "Citizenship in a Republic"

⁴⁶ "The American Scholar"

⁴⁷ *Genealogy*

creation of a uniquely American ethos he was eager to sever cultural and artistic links with "the courtly muses of Europe."⁴⁶ The result is far from a defined American essence, but rather a stalwart antagonism toward that-which-has-been. While some are willing to play the shell game with Emerson to excuse him from his most radical positions, the same cannot ignore the widespread impact which his radicalisms have had on American academics and art. Emerson embodies Nietzsche's aphorism that "men would rather will nothing than not will at all."⁴⁷ A bitter jealousy towards European fine art pervades his writings—something which he masquerades as a desire for newness: "a new thing... a new thought... a whole new experience... new age... new confessions... new religion... new style of face, a new person."⁴⁸ Indeed, Harold Rosenberg defines "modernist art" as, "the tradition of the new,"⁴⁹ and Peter Childs does not go far enough when he notes that, "it contains elements of decreation..."⁵⁰ But what is newness except that-which-currently-is-not? Indeed, one is hard pressed to define "newness" any way but negatively: that which *nobody* has yet seen; that which is *unlike* anything as of now; *not* existing before. ("There is nothing new under the sun... whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it.") Emerson dedicates painstaking efforts to

⁴⁸ "The Poet"

⁴⁹ *The Tradition of the New*

⁵⁰ *Modernism*

logisize out of traditional poetic forms, yet it is not his anti-traditionalism per se that is of interest here, but the antagonism, for in Emerson's prerogative of abandonment is a sprint toward nothing, and by his passionate renunciation he finds himself in the void, and American artists since then have unscrupulously followed him into [...]. Emerson's conclusion that "society everywhere is a conspiracy against the manhood of everyone of its members"⁵¹ is revealing—Emerson, whose "looks and thoughts were always downward bent,"⁵² had deconstructed the world, and evidently the world deconstructed him.

Emerson's virulent artistic antagonism is the beginning of modern art—the rejection of traditional forms, and the subjection of form itself to substantial representation—signification, culture, and politics ("but what does it *mean*? What is this trying to say?")—putting the cart before the horse—grotesque. The Emersonian, modern artist's job is to wet his thumb, discern the direction of the political winds, then materialize it. The most successful modern artist is he who says the most and says it the most politically correctly, i.e. nihilistically and pessimistically. Emerson, therefore, though espousing a form of "traditional" idealism which he calls "transcendentalism," nevertheless rejects the artistic

⁵¹ "Self-Reliance"

⁵² See Moloch in *Paradise Lost*

⁵³ *The Poet*

⁵⁴ "The prince should avoid every novel idea as far as he is capable of doing so; for even if conditions are bettered thereby, the very

ideal by denouncing "Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Raphael [as having] obviously no limits to their works, except the limits of their lifetime, and resemble a mirror carried through the street."⁵³ Granted that this is an accurate analysis of Shakespeare, for Emerson art is not the materialization of the ideal via form, but a political statement which reflects the sensual world. This movement to turn art into a vehicle of political expression vis a vis materializing "newness" has at its heart conglomeration, which itself is the result of the antagonistic or anti-being nature of that-which-is-new = not-old or not-what-is.⁵⁴ More on conglomeration later, but for now consider the archetypal Emersonian modern American artist—Walt Whitman—who in a letter to Emerson declares his poetic project to be, "begotten of yourself [Emerson]," and "a withdrawal from precedent... [with] new great masters to comprehend new arts, new perfections, new wants."⁵⁵ The result is that Whitman iconically writes in his magnum opus, *Leaves of Grass*, "I contain multitudes," i.e. "I am conglomerated." Whitman was not practicing Being from the unary source by which the ideal is made real—art—via the action of existence = creation, but from a sensual reaction to the world and a deconstruction of "America"; the result is inherently political and hyper-substantial—explicitly anti-

innovation is a stumbling block." -Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince, 1516 AD, Netherlands*

⁵⁵ *Leaves of Grass*

formal. Again, the origin of this conglomerated, sensual, politically substantial mode of art as expression (instead of formal idealization) is the offspring of Emersonian “newness” = not-that-which-is = non-being or antagonism.

To be more explicit, the man who instigated this American *infolding*, prohibited the expression of our Being, and preached the doctrine of anti-has-been auto-cannibalism was Ralph Waldo Emerson, as Ruprecht says, “[Emerson’s] blissfully comic mentality may see itself as hopeful. But this is not hope; it is simply a mood of unearned opti-mism”⁵⁶—the non-existent utopia achieved through an abolition of *everything else*. Ruprecht goes on to note that America’s Emersonian race-toward-nothing attitude *for the sake of racing* (“progress”) is critiqued by Fitzgerald: “Gatsby believed in the green light.”⁵⁷ Since Emerson’s demolition of “The American Scholar”, should we be convinced that no great art which reflects the American Being has been generated? Mark Twain not excepted, save perhaps for one archetype: the comic book superhero, who cannot receive enough applause. The American adaptation of the Greek heroic epics of Achilles, Hercules, and Pericles, who through their will, strength, and divine assistance impose and assert themselves upon that which *is not*, find a renaissance in the most popular characters of DC and Marvel. The modern American artists, in stark contrast are Lex Luthors, Green Goblins,

and Jokers—envious, antithesizing technicians whose (non-)being is consumed by anti-has-been-ness—antagonism—the anti-man; they are reactionaries who maintain themselves as anti-has-beens—perpetual rebels—infolding on history, consuming the thrice-digested, and reproducing regurgitated, innutritious corpses as their fathers did. The American comic book heroes are indomitable because they *are*—they insist on Being and they *will*. Emerson’s fear of the hero—his flight from Being—his refusal to *will* what *shall be*, his groveling for an *anti-synthesis*—envy, still synthetic—cannot produce a hero, but popular deconstructions. Heroes are too terrible for these will-less synthesizers, for a hero populates the void—a creator whose assertion inherently testifies against Nothingness. Emersonians—the *are-nots*, will-nots, shall-nots—the deconstructors, the Luthors, Goblins, Jokers—the villains—are the vengeful Stockhold Syndromic servants of what *has been*. The modern American “artist” “*would rather not*.” Who better embodies the conglomerated, antagonistic, envy of nihilists than Lex Luthor, the technological anti-synthesis of Metropolis. He *is not*, *will not*, *shall not*. Americans reproduce these anti-heroes—a perpetual regression—the void—the nature of Satan:—the enemy, the accuser, the deconstructor of Being par excellence—appositionality *to God*, who *has been*, *is*, and *shall be* (more on this later). At the extreme, Satan [...] (nothing/not), such as the case in the culmination of modernity: Stalin and Mao—the pinnacle of

⁵⁶ “We Never Got the Joke: Comedy and Tragedy in Modern Politics”

⁵⁷ *The Great Gatsby*

deconstruction, the antithization of what *has been*, the negation of Being—the substitution of independent *man* for the conglomerated legion—(“for we are many”). This is Emerson’s aesthetic and the modern American “artist’s”—afraid of his own existence and who *will not* what *shall be* and *is not* what has been. The villain is the synthetic man, the artificial man, the conglomerated man—the anti-man = the antagonist.

Antithisizers. Renounces. Deconstructors. Antagonists. *Decomposers*—intellectual fungi who prey on what *is* and what *will*. While it takes faith and courage *to be* and *to will*—to construct and assert one’s Being—there is an assumption of cowardice in embracing the anonymity of the anarchic mob of deconstructors, so we ask, as laboring in the quarry of the rubble of The Academy under the shadow of the technological eye of Sauron, where is the American *composer*? Why has America yet produced no great work of orchestration? Are we listening for it? We have shut our ears to life—to ourselves. We continually synthesize what *has been*; we amalgamate it, cannibalize it—we technologize. Our youths have blockaded themselves from the music of America, that is, that inspiring sonorous germ which longs to be revealed calling out from its cocoon of our Being in the world to meet the sincere artistic spark within us which we eagerly repress, as Bloom observes, “As long as they have the Walkman on, they cannot hear what the great tradition has to say. And after its

⁵⁸ *The Closing of the American Mind*

prolonged use when they take it off they find that they are deaf.”⁵⁸ In our zeal for severance from the past (the old)—Emerson—we have ironically set thereon our focus like victims of Stockholm Syndrome in a continual deconstruction. We reproduce the past upside down. Generations feed on the bony, feathery regurgitations of artless scavengers—this, the so called “modern American artists.” The Romans inscribed the honorary platitudes of their national virtue on their public buildings; was this not redundant? or rather was it architecture that inscribed itself onto its citizens? Are we not already born into a synthesis of the past ages? as Eliot writes, “The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did.’ Precisely, and they are that which we know”⁵⁹, but in our antagonism we Americans think, “I am *not* that which has been!” Should we not rather say, “I am that which *shall be*?”—an impossibility for the non-being—the existential nihilist. Should we leave our progeny, as our fathers have and their fathers before, with a perpetually and intentionally perverted reproduction? No, and yet the American “composer” has discovered a thousand and one ways *not to be* Bach. How unoriginal, predictable, and innutritious! If we Americans would tear our envious ears away from balking at and mocking what *has been*, consider that the true artist creates what *is*, listen to the stories which our Being in the world desperately desires to be told, then behind every cobblestone we would find a symphony,

⁵⁹ “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

and we would no longer serve our children, as we for so long have, mere rubble *a la mode*.

Perhaps our constitution is not prepared for such a revival (from the Latin *revivere*—literally, “to live again”). Such a composer would terrify, for we would be compelled to face ourselves. Would we stand to acknowledge that the contemporary American is a synth? We call our syntheticism “fusion” to prevent us from taking responsibility for what *shall be*. We have relegated our artistry to the agency of the conglomerate, as if to say, “You unknown and uncontrollable cosmic democratic force, *you* shall make my future! I cannot bear that burden. *Que sera sera*.” Thus, we live in Europe’s ash heap and say, “This will suffice.” Our culture is a popular one. We pluck a thin rib from our mother’s hairy regurgitation, hold it up to our neighbor and ask, “Does this offend you? No? Then it does not offend me either,” and so on, until our whole country is eulogizing a thrice-digested carcass, and nobody can say why. None of us can stand solid food, for none of us can distinguish good from evil, that is, we have no taste. We are accustomed to reanimating what *has been*, murdering it again, and then cannibalizing the twice dead corpse *without salt*. So, we wretch at the lively flavor of Being; we cannot stomach its pungent heartiness, never mind having the audacity to prepare it for consumption

⁶⁰ Picasso’s modernist abomination “Les Demoiselles D’Avignon” was, according to Childs, inspired by the transgressive significance of the African mask—no more astute an analysis was every performed on a painting as this. The painting is definitively

(it does take audacity), and against those hearties who have tried to serve us from the reflections of our better angels, we hold the feast up to our neighbors again and ask, “Does this offend you? You do not know? You have no opinion? Then neither do I,” and the dish is returned.

America does not lack genius, but the courage to assume responsibility to engage it via *conviction* in the face of the ever more voracious Void. We are neck deep in a circuitous rut as we hold our noses in the air and scoff at that which we tread down—what *has been*. The mere mention of a Greek or Latin name makes us sick, and it is that sickness which we (de)generate in our art. As Picasso says, “It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child—indeed, “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”⁶⁰ The most American art, we say, is the most *sick*—the most disgusted with old Europe; we require surgery for our cynical artistic backwardness. *Be!* Enough *becoming*—it is a Nothing. The art of other nations at every time has signified itself; we denounce that which we *are not*. We leave our story to chance, and our Being becomes neglected and enfeebled—our artistic sense, atrophied. Can a culture long nourish itself on that which *is not*? But we have become accustomed to Nothingness, resistant to *existence*, and ignorant of *will*—FAITH. We could not be overharsh in our censorship of the cowardice of the

transgressive, but the weight of that word has been lost in the modernist sea of antagonism.

so-called modern American artist in his refusal *to be*—his headlong embrace of non-existence—existentialism.

America has many predictors and prognosticators of the future, but very few makers of it. The former does not require a willful trust in the legitimacy of one's Being and the courage to withstand that which *is not*, and while nihilism prevails, "a bad tree cannot bear good fruit", and an evaluation of the roots of our generation, like its predecessor, suffices to indicate what shall be our produce: who treat our art as rebellion against what has been, so that one may accurately say that so long as our "artists" remain attached to their antagonism, merely the inversion of what *was* twenty years ago, which itself was the regurgitated *carriion* of what *was* before them.

What is the attitude of the modern American? The envious, nihilistic, anti-heroic, deconstruction worker—shall we say destroyer? "We are [...]. We will [...]. We shall be [...]." The modern American is propelled by what *is not*, having sacrificed his Being, and what remains is [...]*—the notorious blank canvas—the void—modern art.* When a man knows himself *to be*, and more terribly, has the courage *to will*, we can be sure that the antagonists of reality will gnash at him with their teeth and set themselves to the deconstruction of what he *is*. If the last enemy to be subjected under the feet of Christ is death, then the last thing to be deconstructed by the nihilist is *life*, until we have devoured ourselves like insatiable black holes. And what shall be left? [...] As the demon

says, "What is best of all is not to be born, not to *be*, to *be nothing*. The second best for you, however, is soon to die."⁶¹ The American professor—the acolyte of critical postmodernism—scoffs at the call to *be* or *will*, but neither can his nihilistic sensitivities long endure the man who *is*. The antithesizing villain must deconstruct man's Being by conglomerating all that *is not* into an absurd non-entity, and this is the essence of the modern American's populist, artistic subject (object).

Will we heed the fire bell? We have been so long entreated by the anti-man—the deconstructor—for this is the religion of the American university professoriate. The *are-nots* have been drawing American youths into the absurd—the void of [...]—for generations. Look to the syllabi of every course informed by critical theory to find the myriad of Beings *against* which the spirits of our so-called professors *are-not*; the non-existentiality of these non-beings is replicated through the earnest ears of pre-primed rebels. The Modern American University is a large cheese grater, and the exemplars of this *not-what-has-been-ness*: the so called "Race theorists" and "Gender theorists" who portend to social-scientific liberation but are no more than deconstructors of the highest caliber. The anti-man has his eye on that which *is not*. He lives in the realm of the absurd—the un-real. The nature of this attitude is aesthetic decay—the erosion of what *is*—namely, beauty, but how deep should we pry into the hearts of those who criticize beauty, lest

⁶¹ *Paradise Lost*

we do not heed Nietzsche's warning that "He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you"?⁶² Our professors will not be satisfied with the state of American ethos until the doctrine of our graduates is [...]—total nullification,⁶³ until the significance of all symbols is deconstructed into arbitrary Nothingness even to the Hegelian synthesis of "good" and "evil." Deconstruction—the work of the antagonist and the mantra of critical theory—is the deification of [...], as Burke observes, "[The dissenting congregations of non-conformity] are not for the diffusion of truth, but for the spreading of contradiction. Let the noble teachers but dissent, it is no matter from whom or from what." How deeply have we dived into this antithization. How thoroughly have we embraced the hatred of Being. In exchange for this anti-philosophy—the nihilistic non-doctrines of postmodernism—we reap the fruit of anarchy fertilized by the ashes of the idols—the decadent she-wolf "drunken with the blood of the saints."

⁶² *Beyond Good and Evil*

⁶³ "[According to the humanitarian] there is inequality, therefore injustice, which can be remedied only by the abolition of all individualities, and the reduction of all individuals to the race, or humanity, man in general. He can find no limit to his agitation this

World as Reflexive Object

*Seen from the inside his personal experiences form a unity,
a world; in that world he moves freely and with ease.*

Thorleif Boman⁶⁴

*We can only take cognizance of a world which we ourselves
have made.*

Nietzsche, Will to Power

When, as is commonly done in philosophy, we treat of world as the psycho-phenomenal, experiential relationship between self, memory, and the senses (whereby also between these three a concept of time is developed) there is left out something of the supernatural, that is, extra reasonable, or as Aquinas would say, revelatory. When Heidegger and Sartre describe Being as an act of interpretation rather than definition (following their mode of phenomenology) they relegate man to the position of *receiver of inputs* instead of a materializing projector of forms, whereby also they invert Christ's proverb that "the eye is the lamp of the body"—as if the *world* was the light of the body. Let us pause here; this proverb of Christ may be interpreted in

side of vague generality, which is no reality, but a pure nullity, for he respects no territorial or individual circumscriptions, and must regard creation itself as a blinder." Brownson, *The American Republic*

⁶⁴ "Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek"

two different ways: the first interpretation is supported by what immediately succeeds it, that "when your eye is single your whole body shall be full of light," which is to say, as a matter of interpretation, that the eye is that which illuminates the body. The second interpretation which when conjoined with another saying of Christ—it is not that which goes into a man which defiles him but that which comes out of [his heart]—perhaps offers another insight and allows us to escape the sensory realm of psychology and imbue our conception of world—the reflexive object created by heroism—and Christ's proverb of "the eye", with power, for "the kingdom of God is not in word but power." With this in mind we offer this interpretation: "the eye is the lamp of the body" in the sense that the body possesses the eye as a lantern to illuminate both the world and itself. At the risk of giving too strong of a defense of this interpretation, acknowledge another of Christ's proverbs—having a splinter in one's eye—you are invited to formulate the reason which would make it supportive of our interpretation.

Let us demonstrate this heroic construction of the world based on Christ's proverb with a metaphor. Imagine a dark wanderer in the dark Void who carries a bright lantern wherein are located his eyes. The wanderer is a four dimensional being who inhabits a three-dimensional body in a Void, which Void has the potential for only three dimensions. The fourth dimensionality of the wanderer lies in the eyes of his lantern, which clearly see and exist simultaneously in the plane of the fourth dimension and all lower dimensions. In a glance by the dark wanderer, he turns his eyes

toward himself to perceive his own form, which is as it were a very large building which contains many rooms. Before the wanderer can bring his lantern within himself and explore these chambers with the eyes of his lantern, let us first observe what his interior appears to be strictly within the yet unilluminated three-dimensional confines of the Void; it is like a dark mausoleum in which every room has several empty pedestals with blank name plates constructed for the purpose of harboring a bust. In the centers of each room are also platforms on which statues would be built, and hanging from each ceiling is an unlit censer. The function of each room is to serve as a cenotaph—a grave in which there is no body—such as to be a representation or dedication. Now the wanderer turns the lamp wherein are his bright eyes—the source of which brightness is in the fourth dimension—towards himself to peer through the window of each room from the outside. Here is what he sees whenever he looks through the windows and illuminates the rooms within himself: the dormant censer alights the room by the instigation of the bright eyes of the lamp and will remain lit for a temporary duration after the lamp is removed. The new light of the censer now reveals that every pedestal has the head of a man on top which is looking at statues of fantastic shapes in the center, and this is repeated for every room in which he looks. While any of the many rooms remain lit, they imbue and strengthen the eyes of the lamp to emanate various colors. With every new color of the eyes of the lamp corresponding to a certain room being lit, the wanderer turns his lamp towards the Void and begins to populate his world with substances such as trees, rivers, beds, and chairs. But after some time if the wanderer does not turn the eyes of

his lamp toward the interior of his mausoleum body and examine a room through its window, that censer will be extinguished, and the busts and statues will be unrevealed. The eye of the lamp will then lose its corresponding color, and the corresponding substance atop the Void will disappear. When the wanderer's mausoleum body has every censer fully illuminated, his lantern is shining with very many colors, and it appears that he dwells in Paradise, every three-dimensional null space being substantiated.

The world of the wanderer is a geographical landscape of his knowledge, and his Being in the world is a technological relationship such that his world's substances are according to that which suits him or are congenial to his ideal tastes or purposes. By a reflection or study of the forms, which in practice is a conformity of self to the truth by an enlightenment of those areas of his soul which require spiritual nourishment, the wanderer does not merely define himself as if he were humanistically discovering his own essences, but manifests his own eternal Being in his apparent reality—the three-dimensional space. In his body's unilluminated state, it is of the same nature as the Void—Nothingness. The wanderer's real Being is not in the three-dimensional realm but is perceived there through his lamp. The fallacy of assuming that he himself is a creature of the Void is nihilism, and such a nihilistic

⁶⁵ In *Contra Academicos*, when asked by skeptics “whether or not the world exists given that the senses are deceptive” Augustine is the first to conceive of the subjective phenomenal world which includes the subject's dreams, given that the world is simply what it appears to be to first-personal consciousness. Descartes similarly

wanderer would go to great lengths to distance himself from or extinguish the flame of his lamp through feats of specious logical reasoning. The censer is the power that the soul has to interact with and sustain a spiritual reality, the busts are intelligence, and the statues are representations of the forms.

A world then is not the subjectively interpreted rabbit-duck essence of a physical entity, nor is it the willful transformation of a worldly entity into that which the subjective being desires.⁶⁵ A metaphysical world is the collection of entities which represent the sum of at-hand knowledge of the heroic subject. For example, consider Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, by whom, after sinning and by sin, “death entered into the world,” and the world, that is the earth (them having sole and total dominion over it) thereby died. But what was Adam and Eve's sin except to adopt the characteristic of the devil by giving their attention to him, in a sense allowing themselves to be defined by Satan.

Charles Baxter in his book *Wonderlands* defines a “Wonderland” as a setting in a story which personifies the character—a psychological environment which mirrors a character's personality or mentality—the world exteriorizes a character's interiority. This phenomenon he calls the setting's “subjectivity,” but this nomenclature is inaccurate for our purposes.⁶⁶ The protagonist is the

articulates the existence of the world as that which is perceived by the senses, see *Sixth Meditation*.

⁶⁶ There are two common connotations for the antonymic terms “subjective” and “objective.” The first is their grammatical definition: the subject is the “doer,” and the object is the recipient of the “doing.”

Being who *is* and who *will*—the hero is the subject.⁶⁷ The world—the “Wonderland”—is the object which reflects, but more accurately, is defined by the hero’s assertive Being, e.g. “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever.” Baxter’s “subjectivity” refers to the liability of a world to be interpretively observed by a character or narrator. We linguistically place this power squarely in the Being of the protagonist. The protagonist has the subjective *will to be*, which the world as object reflects, i.e., “When you are smiling, the whole world smiles with you.” Flippant as is that example, we are neither describing merely a psychological tick, literary device, nor social phenomenon, but a spiritual law—a metaphysical principle. The reflexive, worldly entity, generalizing to the world—a world—possesses or inhabits the definition or essence which the subjective hero asserts through his Being.⁶⁸ We are not talking about the first Adam’s right to name the animals in his pre-knowledge-of-good-and-evil condition in the Garden

The second is the philosophical: the subject is the being who views the world through an individual apparatus. Objects comprise that world. May our usage be properly discerned as we progress.

⁶⁷ In my treatment of the terms “hero” and “villain,” I do not offer definitions with any moral criteria. “Hero” and “villain” are often connoted with the terms “good” and “evil,” respectively, but this is not my definition. Instead, more appropriate criteria would be “protagonism” and “antagonism.” Under my definitions and the common understanding of morals, a hero may appear evil, and a villain good, or, more easily understood, a protagonist may be evil, and an antagonist may be good (assuaged in the following chapter). However, “protagonist” and “antagonist” are relative, dramatic terms. My uses of “hero” and “villain” are often nothing more than

of Eden—closer, as we have said, to the existentialists’ concept of interpretation—but the second Adam’s Being—godlikeness as world creator, that is, the power to assert one’s own essence as true and real—to realize a world—to disclose that which is unrevealed.⁶⁹

The modern conception of the hero—epitomized in the “hero’s journey”—is a person who overcomes great challenges to attain a desire wherein there is an inherent change of condition or state, as in departing from a bad place (or trait) to inherit a good one, but this type of hero must *become* a hero—he is not inherently heroic, but requires transitioning—moving from unheroic to heroic. The classical hero, such as Hercules and Achilles, however, eternally *are* heroes—they are born heroes. The classical hero does not *become* a hero—he *is* a hero, and his heroism is manifested, or brought into existence, by the creation and ordering of his world via the assertion of his Being = faith. The arrival of the hero “on the scene” orients the sensual yet-non-existent world

cloaks to Being and anti-being—protagonism and antagonism not understood as relative qualifiers to different characters or entities, but as relationships to Being; see Hamlet’s dilemma: “To be or not to be,” which is indeed “the question,” but more on this later.

⁶⁸ “For though a man can be human (that is, transcendent) without ceasing to be a male, a woman cannot be. To realize her femininity she must be an object, which is to say she must renounce being a subject.” Mansfield, *Manliness*

⁶⁹ “Imagination is a creation of its own object.” Roger Scruton, “The True, the Good and the Beautiful”

towards himself in the case of his powerful imposition, or away from himself in the case of the void's obstinate refusal or maintenance of non-being, i.e. the exposure of antagonism in villainy—the gravity or magnetism of heroism, which in its creativity both attracts and phenomenologically repels.

The anti-man—he who objects qua objection (refutes)—in assuming the mind of the *am-not*, declares that his Being is not in himself. That which he *is not* now defines him. The villain becomes the object of definition, or at least susceptible to the arbitrary definition of what *is not*—defined by the *non-entity* of the void; the object which he refutes becomes the subjective definer—the worldly thing being essentially dead, or rather *not being* alive (unless you are an animist—one who believes in the sentience of material objects, but it seems, as says the scripture, that “the world is passing away”). Those who will have the world conform to themselves are already assuming the nature of the deconstructor, for they have relegated their Being to *without themselves*. The world, according to the estimation of the antagonist, having its own pre-existence, has its own form—nature. “Changing the world,” therefore, is a reflection on one's own artificiality—discontentment and disapproval. The artificial man, entering the world and seeking to change it, declares, “this *shall not be*.” This antagonistic man requires justification, for he essentially *is not*, and the

accusation that “the world is unjust” is a self-inditement à la Emerson, but more on this later.

Sartre's disconnection of the “I” from “Being” (I / Am)—an “atheism of consciousness”⁷⁰—is in a sense the disempowerment of heroism from the hero; it is a negative association of the what-should-be-“subject” with the in-animacy, or non-being, of worldly objects, which leads to his existential, nihilistic dread. Sartre's world exudes its non-essence onto the neutered non-entity of the anti-being, which leads him to the horrible conclusion of self-objectification. The abdication of agency to another entity—allowing oneself to be defined by an objective entity (essentially the void, ergo the renunciation of Being), is the generic phenomenon occurring around all pessimistic, anti-being nihilists. This effect is demonstrated in Sartre's *Nausea* (“by their fruits you will know them). From Carruth's introduction: “Roquentin discovers one day when he picks up a stone on the seashore and is suddenly overcome by an ‘odd feeling’; it is the feeling of being confronted by bare existence...he gradually discovers that all essences are volatile, until, in the confrontation with the chestnut tree, he finds himself in the presence of reality itself reduced to pure existence: disgusting and fearsome.”⁷¹ For Sartre's existentialist subject (which has made himself an object of Nothingness), a doorknob is not a doorknob, but a “cold object.” A hand is not a hand but a “fat white worm.” This is not merely a resistance to teleology—a

⁷⁰ See Gardner's *‘Being and Nothingness’: A Reader's Guide*

⁷¹ Carruth's introduction to Sartre's *Nausea*

disdain for the ultimate purposes of objects—but an experience of the vanity of mere entities. “Jazz” is a motif in the novel which the narrator frequently invokes as another symbol of the void’s chaos: “there is no melody, only notes, a myriad of tiny jolts.” For what is jazz after all but the deconstruction of music? The object—the world—has become the definer which negatively subjects Antoine Roquentin to its nihilistic essence—the realm of Nothingness to which the undisclosed object—the brute existence of a doorknob—belongs. Again, this is not a failure of Antoine to give the object a meaning or telos, but a failure *to be*, and by that Being to positively create a world out of the void. The hero, by contrast, is not overcome by the nihilistic chaos of the non-entity, indeed it is not even a threat, because the Hero *is* and *will*, and his world reflects that Being. Antoine never had a hope of being “cured” from his “illness,” for he begins from the position of *am not*. “I am afraid of what will take possession of me... I am neither virgin nor priest enough to play with the inner life... I can no longer do what I will... When I question myself I see that it happens *that I am myself and that I am here* [sic].” Antoine’s understanding of himself is circular, recursive, and redundant. His existential non-being leads his “I am” only back to his own ego where he finds... nothing. He might as well have said, “*that I am not you and I am not there.*” *Nausea* lives up to its name—it is a sickening book because it gives a glimpse into the mind of the anti-being (it was written for that purpose). This is the pessimistic lethargy

⁷² “Credit and the Fine Arts: A Practical Application”

of modernism—the illness from which our world suffers. When God looked into the void he did not become nauseous but asserted his Being—“I Am”.

T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” written during the interwar years when *Nausea* is set, and written from a sanitarium during a “complete physical breakdown,”⁷² as Pound says, reflects the same subsumption of the *will not*, anti-being nihilist to the chaotic eruption of modernity’s total Nothingness. The poem, in five sections, is a response to the Great War—an attempt to capture the general European disillusionment with life caused by what seemed like meaningless bloodshed. Much of the poem is written literally from the perspective of the dead (all of it is written figuratively from that perspective)—the *not*-alive. The title itself “Waste Land” suggests the deadness of the world—a dead world—the void—that is objectifying its inhabitants and entangling them in the snare of its own negative non-essence. The symbolism of Tarot cards—the perfect image of the world’s lifeless entities commanding and defining the would-be heroic subject—man—is the ultimate renunciation of Being—the handing over of agency and *will-to-be* to the void. At its heart, the poem is fragmented, as Virginia Woolf says: “What connects it together, I’m not so sure.”⁷³ One would be reaching to impose a structure on the poem anything more than *chaotic splinters*. It *is not* beautiful, easily explained, as the world, as such, in its essence, that is, unimposed

⁷³ *Diary, Volume II*

upon and undefined by Being, *is not*. Eliot allows his poem to be authored and essentialized by the void. When the poet permits his Being to become a conduit of the void, his art is no longer creative but deconstructive. It is “deeply pessimistic, even nihilistic” as Martin says⁷⁴—“The great catastrophe of our letters,” according to William Carlos Williams⁷⁵. At the highest level, or perhaps lowest, the object of anti-art, like “The Waste Land,” is the deconstruction of beauty, but you might say, “the world *is not* beautiful”—Eliot’s world certainly *was not*. Ours *is*. “The Waste Land” as Froula says, is “modernism’s most widely read monument.”⁷⁶ Absurdity, absurdity.⁷⁷

In passing through the world, the anti-Man says, “I *am not* this. I *am not* that,” and firmly declares himself to be a non-entity—non-existent. Phenomenally, the antagonist—non-being—the *villain*—declaring himself “*not this*” is placing himself in the realm of either infinite Nothingness or thingly-absence. How can a positive, that is, existential, *will* emerge from this state of non-existence? The result is *will not*. “I *am not* and therefore I *will not*.” Nietzsche understood that losing one’s center of gravity by being influenced into a disjointedness by one’s environment is a sign of decadence. As Hurrell

⁷⁴ *A Collection of Critical Essays on ‘The Waste Land’*

⁷⁵ *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*

⁷⁶ “Text and Transference in the Reception of The Waste Land”

⁷⁷ For an unlikely, positive example of an inter-war years protagonist—a hero—in contrast to the previous modernist, existentialist works to demonstrate that the void is conquerable and awaits definition—to be disclosed—even amidst the incalculable

says, “decadence denotes a disunity within a self.”⁷⁸ The non-being, *am not* of antagonism towards the world inevitably leads to the conglomerated, disjointed, disunity of decadence, more on this later.

We know that the hero’s act of defining the ideal and its subsequent manifestation truly extends into the world of appearances even to the so-called miraculous, as Christ’s works are properly called a demonstration of power—the disclosing of the ideal. One might say then, who is justified in this power but he who, like God, may truthfully affirm “I am?”—the hero. If he does not of himself assume this godliness, he is at least permitted by God to do so, but this justification—to assume authority over the void and inhabit “the stature of the fulness” of Being—where is it found?

violence of a world war, see Pablo Picasso’s works from 1914 to 1925. After operating in the modernist, extremist, progressive (new! = not-what-is) style of cubism and collages (conglomerated deconstructions), Picasso and other artists found refuge and stability in timeless ideal forms—his “classical period.”

⁷⁸ “An Analysis of Nietzsche’s Conception of Decadence”

Justice and Existence – A Theodicy

Therefore as long as they exist, they are good. Accordingly, whatever things exist are good, and the evil into whose origins I was inquiring is not a substance.

Augustine, The Confessions: Book VII

The impetus of Plato's *The Republic* is the search for a definition of justice. In the opening of the book, Socrates and Glaucon are attending a festival when they are invited by Polemarchus to his house where almost immediately upon arrival, after questioning Polemarchus's father about old age and fortune, Socrates asks the congregation, "as concerning justice, what is it?" When several interlocutors have given contentious, uncongenial definitions, Socrates proposes this mode of inquiry: let us theoretically construct the ideal city, and in it we will identify justice—the republic is born. By the end of Book IV, a definition of justice through its identification in the ideal republican state and extension to the ideal individual is reached, because "we may find justice on a larger scale in the larger entity, and so easier to recognize": first, the ideal city, according to Socrates, is composed of three distinct classes—Guardians (the philosopher kings), the Auxiliary (military and officials), and the businessmen—all of which are assigned positions based on their merit under the

principle that each man "specialize appropriately on a single job for which he is naturally fitted and neglects all others"; second, by proceeding via process of elimination beginning with the four and only four principal virtues—wisdom, courage, self-discipline, and justice—Socrates posits that, "if we can identify some of these qualities in it, the ones that are left will be the ones we are looking for," thus after identifying wisdom as the Guardians, courage as the Auxiliary, and self-discipline as the synergistic relationship of each part to the other—"this unanimity in which there is a natural concordance between higher and lower about which of them is to rule in state and individual"—Socrates is left with justice as the—"Tally ho!"—"the requirement we laid down at the beginning...that in our state one man was to do one job, the job he was naturally most suited for. So perhaps justice is...minding one's own business." This may seem to be too acute, but Socrates goes on to expand on this definition and extend it to the individual, beginning with acknowledging the contrapositive, which is more intuitive:

Interference by the three classes with each other's jobs, and interchange of jobs between them, therefore, does the greatest harm to our state, and we are entirely justified in calling it the worst of evils.

Such as the proverb in *Ecclesiastes*:

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler: Folly

is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.
I have seen servants upon horses, and princes
walking as servants upon the earth. Woe to thee,
O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes
eat in the morning! Blessed art thou, O land, when
thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat
in due season, for strength, and not for
drunkenness!

Finally, after a “rough passage” by Socrates—such is logic—to show that, “the individual man is just in the same way that the state is just,” and showing the mind to have three parts corresponding to those of the ideal city: reason, spiritedness, and appetite, respectively—Socrates concludes that a man will be “self-disciplined when all these three elements are in friendly and harmonious agreement... and there is no civil war among them,” and “when he has bound these elements into a disciplined and harmonious whole, and so become fully one instead of many, he will be ready for action of any kind,” and “[injustice] must be some kind of civil war between these same three elements.” What we take away now is this unity—“harmonious wholeness” and “fully one”—which unity we will easily appropriate to Being, alongside self-sufficiency and independence. In the next chapter, “The Conglomerated Soul” of the antagonist—which also is marked by the internal disjointedness and faction of mental “civil war” which Socrates deduces—we indeed find injustice. This oneness of Being as justice, and the conglomerated multiplicity of antagonism as injustice is one proof of

“Justice as Existence”, but there is more to consider, because although in this way we may syllogize from Being to oneness to justice, we seek a more immediate route to demonstrate, as Augustine concludes, that something which *is*, by nature of its Being or existence, is inherently justified in existing.

We seek a more expansive definition of justice—one beyond the constraint of law— one that can accommodate that Being which defines what is honorable—one even which accommodates Aristotle's transcendently philosophical lawmaker. The debased definition of justice—the “shadow of justice” as Plato's Socrates says in *The Republic*, “held by men who have never seen justice itself,” claims that “such a thing is justified because it is legal” and “this is unjustified because it is illegal,” and so on with any other criteria; true and false, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, etc. What is meant when one pronounces justification on an object? What's more, the justification of the subject? of Being? the non-being?

When we say, “I am justified,” what we mean is, “I have a right to exist.” To go even further: when we say, “this law is just” we mean, “this law should exist.” Justice is Being and its object's positive right to, or normal expediency of, *existence*. Consider an example which will help us to strip away from justice the common connotations and criteria which we give it in utilitarian contexts: a newborn child immediately delivered from the womb carrying the assumptions that this child has

neither performed an unlawful or “bad” deed, nor can we, assuming that it is a healthy and normal child, reasonably ascribe to it any essential “negative” property (false, ugly, cowardly, etc.). Is this newborn baby justified? Perhaps we would like to dismiss this as a categorically ridiculous question by virtue of the child’s inability to act and possess responsibility. This would be the case under a conception of justice concerned merely with the law, or “good and evil,” and what is justification concerned about lawfulness or goodness?

“I am just (*to be*)”—to assert that one’s own Being possesses the essence of justice. To go further: to assert that one’s own Being is under the dominion of justice, or even further, to assert that one’s own Being is located within the sphere of justice. Man as subject—as Being—defines himself through his *will*. First, consider a Being’s assertion—the projection of his invincible *will*, the act of *defining*—onto a reflexive worldly entity: “This is just (*to will*).” Being implies a world defined by and composed of entities defined by the manly subject. Being creates a world. This is not a polytheistic egoism, but the reflexive objectification of the world and its entities by the essence of the subjective Being. Being in the world obviously does not preclude the existence of other sentient creatures in that physical space, nor the transcendental, universal categories, but can two men truthfully define an entity differently? Or put another way, is it possible that different Beings are different essentially? that a hero is not *the* Hero? No. The essence of the relationship between two heroes—faithful subjects—is unity—

oneness of mind having their nature bound in the same action (Being), grounded in the singular truth of existence in reality and unified in a familial bond under God, for example, Achilles and Odysseus; to invoke the Thomistic taxonomy: although their accidental essences may be different, their necessities are the same. The negation is untrue of the relationship between non-beings, antagonists, villains, etc; the only isomorphism of emptiness is itself (see the combative jealousy of the demons inhabiting Pandemonium in *Paradise Lost*).

This non-man requires justification. As Sheehan says, “becoming must be justified at every moment.” He seeks it in vain, constantly searching for that worldly thing to uphold himself, but not having his Being in himself (the anti-man essentially *is not*) he cannot existentially join himself to the other thing in the world—does not say “I am *this*”—cannot identify with the positive, transcendental category of justice, not that Being necessitates the relativity of categorical attachments, but in fact creates them through *will*. The justification for the non-being’s existence lies in the authority of his claim of *being* something beside himself, and here is a paradox, an absurdity, and the error of conglomeration: even an infinite sum of negatively formed essences cannot be comprehended as the perfect total phenomena of a thing’s Being (this is Sartre’s proof of objectivity outside of consciousness, happily appropriated). The claim of “I am not unjustified” cannot lead to justification, and it is for a similar cause that our legal system merely declares one as “not guilty” instead of “innocent,” for the

justification of one's existence or actions cannot be defined by the world, but only by the assertion of Being.

Within the secular justice system, we approach justice as if it were *from the bottom up* by means of interpretations. Atheistic modernism cannot explain justice beyond descriptive, infinitely regressive, retroactive moralizations, e.g. Being is justified in its goodness, etc. etc. etc.; they are presented with an object and set to the task of elucidating what properties are associated with it—Heidegger's hermeneutics—whether they are good or evil, and then pass a sentence; we call this judgment, but this is not the judgment which Being manifests. Consider the parable of “the wheat and the tares”; the hero defines his object in the process of creation as either good, by manifesting the ideal, or evil, more on this later. Judgment therefore is inherent in Being.

The legal conception of justice—and more obviously, of antagonism itself—has its root in the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam's consumption of the fruit was not untransformative, as some might claim, but was effectual in “opening their eyes”, as God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil”, and the most immediate result of it was death, i.e. the severance of coexistence with God—the cessation of a positive Being—through a sensuous consciousness defined by the nonexistent, dead world, “his looks and thoughts were always downward bent,” i.e. the Stockholm Syndromic fascination with sensual reality

that objectifies the conscious subject, more on this later. Indeed, the knowledge of good and evil and death—as we have framed it—are coincident, so why can God possess the knowledge of good and evil and life—Being = quintessential existence—but Adam cannot? This is a pretentious question, because indeed Adam can, that is, “the second Adam.” But before we interrogate the second Adam, let us further explore the incompatibility of the knowledge of good and evil and justice in the first Adam. As we have said, our legal system is based on that knowledge, and is therefore at best an infinite regression toward justice, and at worst is a semblance, charade, and shadow. The sensuous “first Adam,” “made of earth,” being separated from God through death, could find justice only through faith toward God, as in Abaraham, and what is this faith but a tentative identification with Being—the just one? This is the “stumbling stone” which necessitates the demonstration of the futility of the sensuous pseudo-justice of good and evil which we employ—the law, specifically, the Law of Moses and the Levites, what Paul summarizes as, “earthly ordinances; touch not, taste not, handle not, which have the appearance of godliness,” i.e. anti-being, namely, not-being evil. Paul says that “concerning the law, [he was] blameless,” and yet, “he counts that as dung.” What is he counting as dung? The non-being necessitated by the law, i.e. “I *am not* evil.” Again, it is not possible that “not being evil” could lead to “being good,” but this is the nature of law writ large—the best outcome one could hope for is being “not guilty,” and thus

one can never become justified under the law, as Paul again writes.

What is [evil's] root and what is its seed? Or does it not have any being?" writes Augustine, after which he concludes that, "Evil has no positive nature." Augustine's neo-platonic conception of evil as non-entity is the only solution that he offers to the problem of evil, which properly places existence over morality in the hierarchy of principles, but he only briefly alludes to it and does not develop it; he arrives at a tenuous proof for this axiom—existence = goodness—while logicizing over the origins of evil:

It was obvious to me that things which are liable to corruption are good. If they were the supreme goods, or if they were not good at all, they could not be corrupted. For if they were supreme goods, they would be incorruptible. If there were no good in them, there would be nothing capable of being corrupted... If they were to exist and to be immune from corruption, they would be superior because they would be permanently incorruptible. What could be more absurd than to say that by losing all good, things are made better? So then, if they are deprived of all good, they will be nothing at all. Therefore as long as they exist, they are good. Accordingly, whatever things exist are good, and the evil into whose origins I was inquiring in not a substance.

Our goal then is a description of "being justified" divorced from the sensual law of good and evil—the

mode of which is *am-not*-evil—and which excels the mere action of conference or bestowal by God or another magistrate onto an entity, i.e. *by* grace, or *by* faith, which is only one process and criteria of justification, nor do we seek a description of justice, which is irrelevant here, for no matter how one defines justice, being justified presupposes the fulfillment of the necessities of justice, and it is this justification which we begin by assuming Being to possess—certainly if we consider Being = faith, or heroes = faithful ones, and it may be that in an understanding of justification we arrive at an understanding of justice coincidentally. Here is a pitfall that shall be avoided, which would be to inadvertently widen the "narrow gate which leads to life," by means of a syllogism—Being necessitates faith which necessitates justification, ergo the chapter title, "Justice as Existence".

Would God every question the justification for his Being? Would God ever doubt himself? God, the resolute "I Am" requires no justification. Those who separate themselves from him essentially *are not*—the ultimate negative reflection. Regarding good and evil: in the beginning, was it the case that God chose to be good and chose not to be evil? Or in all His actions is there a premeditated deliberation on whether the action which he wants to undertake is either good or evil? Or did God lay out for Himself an arbitrary set of codifications by which He would standardize His actions according to good and evil? No. God *is* good. There must be a value towards which the criteria of good and evil serve, for if

God dictated judgments before acting or creating, then He must have had a purpose in mind for which to use good and evil as measurements, but goodness is a necessary essence of God's Being, and therefore must be an inherent quality of Being itself. Given the command to "be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect," the sensual legalist focuses on the antagonistic binarism of perfection and imperfection, but the faithful focus on the verb upon which perfection is predicated—*be*. How does one *be*, i.e. inhabit eternal existence? By faith.

"*Being* good" and "*not being* evil" are not equivalent statements, likewise neither are "being evil" and "not being good." The positive assertion of Being—"I am *this*"—is to define oneself—to will: "assuredly, this essence characterizes my existence," but to *not assert* one's Being, or *will not*, leaves oneself where? the void—undefined and inessential.

There is something attractive and charming in the man who does not require the approval of others—who is confident in who he *is*, and therefore does not have the need to condemn what *has been* for affirmation, as Aristotle says, "he is the sort of man to confer benefits, but he is ashamed of receiving them; for the one is the mark of a superior, the other of an inferior." However, the haughtiness of the great souled man, as Aristotle describes it—magnanimity, the greatest virtue according to pagan ethics, who justifiably despises those whom he correctly estimates are his inferiors—contempt for the weak—we find to imply an interdependence, and is

therefore uncharacteristic of singular Being, by the glory of whose mere existence is alone sufficient to disgrace antagonists. Machiavelli refutes magnanimity as the defining virtue of the so-called "great souled man," and offers Christian liberality in its stead. Both may be tempered by Aristotle's framework of moderation between extremes—courage is the golden middle of recklessness and cowardice, temperance between excess and asceticism, etc.—and accommodate the necessary pre-existent independence of Being thusly: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." This formulation of the mean between magnanimity and liberality upholds the excellence of the former and liberality of the latter while still retaining the onus of *will* on behalf of the heroic subject. This man is secure in his Being—he essentially *is*—and that is sufficient. The man—the hero—does not require justification, because his Being is in himself. He cannot be offended nor ashamed, because what *shall be* is according to his *will* which rests wholly in who he *is*. The hero himself determines what is and what is not honorable and praiseworthy, because a world—his world—is the objective reflection of his Being—the sum of his knowledge with the quality of his essential character. The sun rises because he wakes, the sky rains because he is thirsty, and a book is printed because he wants to read. This is not an arbitrary anthropocentricity, but the power of Being; it is not a subjective interpretation of pre-existent objects, but a definitive creation. If even Mount Olympus does not conform itself to the will of the hero,

then it must rage against him and “consume into the fat of lambs”, as it was pronounced for the Israelites while they remained within the domain of coexistence with God during their dispensation: “those who curse you shall be cursed, and those who bless you shall be blessed.” Again, why was it that while inquiring for Jesus of Nazareth on the Mount of Olives the night before Passover, it is written that the officers of the Pharisees “went backward and fell to the ground” upon hearing Christ say, “I am he”? The antagonists of Being par excellence could hardly endure in the physical vicinity of the Man bluntly asserting his existence; conversely, the declaration of Being commands *to be* and precludes the presence of non-beings.

We return to the distinction between the first Adam and the second—the “first man” and “the last”: the first man, earthy, the second man, spiritual. One can see the relationship of each to the law, good and evil, and justice, in the gospels, where Christ (the second Adam) is continually reproached by sensual, antagonistic villains (first Adams) concerning the law, goodness, and justice. The first Adam cannot reconcile justification with faith, as we are attempting to do here, but continually demands laws from Christ. A Pharisee is completely dumbfounded when Christ says that he “must be born again”—surely he was expecting more laws as the path to life! Even when Christ does Socratically indulge a young man who inquires of him how he might be saved by saying “do [the law] and you shall live,” the young man realizes the inefficacy of that project, because he indeed has been

doing the law, and yet senses his pitifulness in the presence of Being. When the young man confesses this to Christ, Jesus says, “follow me.” To summarize, Paul says, “by the works of the law shall no man be justified,” and again, “the letter kills.” Why? Because the first man’s carnal minded non-being can only vainly try to “not be evil” through a futile disassociation or negative interpretation of worldly entities—“I am not *this*, etc.”—and thereby cannot achieve a positive essence, e.g. goodness. The second Adam—“I Am”—the eternal “life giving spirit” who *is*, and “in whom we have our being”, is justified *by Being*, because he *is*—he exists, ergo the necessity of *being* born again. For “that which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of spirit is spirit,” “God is spirit” ... “by whom we cry Abba,” and “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” which “is in you.”

We finish with an appeal to the fickle Lady Logic. Here is the statement that we will show is true: one *is*, that is one exists, if and only if one is justified. It is obviously the case in the backwards direction, for “being justified” necessitates Being. It therefore remains to demonstrate that justification is an essential characteristic of Being. Another issue must be delineated because there is a difference in Being and the brute existence of created worldly entities. This is to say that an expansive definition of justice which encapsulates the justification of an object is different from the justification of the hero. It is easy to describe the meaning of a thing being just, i.e. I am just, or the contract is just, which is to say that the object has the properties of justice. It is something else *to be*

justified, and indeed one does not imply the other, i.e. an unjust man may be justified and vice versa, as the scripture says, "God justifies the wicked," and again, the lawful man may not have the approval of God.

We see now that the only thing to show is that Being implies justification. Now, let us argue by way of contradiction. Assume that Being does not imply being justified, then God, the eternal I am, would not be justified solely by virtue of his very existence and would thus himself require justification. We now need to show that God is justified which will thus leave us with two possibilities based on the inference proceeding from our assumption—that God *became*—: either God must have justified himself or he was justified by some other thing through an act of justification, which we must show are really impossibilities. So, is God justified? Satan, the accuser, would for certain answer negatively, but being in a state of justification would preclude the veracity of a charge of guilt, for it would necessarily follow that any action committed by a justified man is itself inherently justified, whether good or evil. An attempt to nominate God as being unjustified must therefore be concerned with the Being of God, not his actions or creations, as if doing well or even perfectly could make one justified, except for the act of making justified; we know that God justifies, and therefore he must himself be justified or else that "making justified" would be illegitimate, but that God's chosen people are indeed justified is true, because God cannot lie. For a further demonstration of God being justified, observe the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because by it it was demonstrated that the void has no claim on God and that He belongs to the realm of

existence, or ought to exist. Now, to say that one might justify oneself implies that one is committing an act of justification while himself beginning in a state of being unjustified, and to commit an act of justification while being unjustified can only be an act of deception, but again God cannot lie. To see that no other thing besides God could have justified him simply acknowledge that the greater blesses the lesser and there is none greater than God. Another proof would be acknowledging that God does not become, because he is eternal, and therefore cannot become justified, but eternally is justified. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and he therefore cannot become but always is and eternally retains the same necessary characteristics of his Being. If God ever was unjustified then he forever is unjustified—untrue. Because the Being of God is the universal Being of the hero. We see that Being implies being justified.

We therefore have the right of Being, but note that this formulation would be inapplicable to the phrasing for instance of the "inalienable right... to life," because although Being necessitates life, living is not sufficient to connote Being, because Being carries many essential characteristics which most living things do not possess, and besides, if life was inherently justified, then death would be unjustified, but God commanded it.

Now, temptation is the attempt by the antagonizing non-being to deceive the heroic subject into asserting a negative *will*—Nothingness. In the case of Christ's temptations by the villainous Satan, the tempter tried to deceive Christ into asserting, "I am not the Son of God,"

when he says, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread," which is to say, "either confess that you *are not*, or perform a miracle"—the former untrue, and the latter a disobedience to the commandment. Sin, therefore, as the scripture says ("whatever is not of faith is sin"), is a failure *to be*, for faith is the assertion of Being. As the ultimate example: Christ, "who was made sin"; this Christ in his quest to totally inherit and inhabit sinfulness culminated in his forsakenness by God—with whom he was one—that is, he was no longer one with God, the "I Am"—this perfect separation from God, the existing one, was therefore His separation from Being, which implies non-being, hence sin. How do we say then that Christ became sin when also he claims godhood, Being "I am"—God never changing, but being the same yesterday today and forever—and yet was it not the case that Christ changed in nature on the cross, for when Christ asks God, "why have you forsaken me?" implicit in that question is that he is no longer the son of God, as if "I am not the son of God"—"I am forsaken by my father." We are given in Revelation that the Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world, and here may be our help, but too mysteriously...

The existentialists' atheistic failure to find descriptions of Being which accommodate the divine Being as the Being and the generic Being in which all other beings necessarily participate is a categorical misunderstanding which rests upon the erroneous assumption that the Being of man is different from the Being of God, and one

finds a paradox even in this atheistic framework, because absent the existence of the deity, man would fit the definition of God as that entity which has the highest understanding, as Christ says, "ye are gods." However, we here are blessed not to carry such baggage, having faith and no false humility; our only burden therefore is to recognize that our handling of Being must accommodate for the divine Being, but this is in fact no burden at all, because the Being of God is the Being of man in Christ, as the scripture says, we have "become partakers of the divine nature." We thus have latitude to explore God's Being as the generic Being in which we also participate. When we discuss justice as existence through God's Being he will not be ashamed for us to appropriate it also for ourselves—God's justification is the Christ man's—the man-God's, as Aquinas says—justification. As Aquinas also says concerning man as the image of God, "according to which he too is the principle of his own actions." We might invoke here Strauss's equivocation of magnanimity and shame in *Athens and Jerusalem*—where he supposes that magnanimity is the virtue of Athens à la Aristotle and shame the virtue of Jerusalem à la Isaiah, with this rebuttal to avoid a false modesty: whereas Isaiah magnanimously volunteers for the office of the Lord's prophet after being purged of his sin, Jeremiah declares himself to be a "child" at the invitation from the Lord—a false modesty—whereby he is rebuked of the Lord: "say not that you are a child... I have this day set you over nations..." Do we not laud David for the brash impetuosity of his assertion that he can slay Goliath and conquer the Philistines? Indeed, as Paul says, we are "more than conquerors."

The Conglomerated Soul

Is there anything worse for a state than to be split and fragmented, or anything better than cohesion and unity? ... Philosophers have the capacity to grasp the eternal and immutable, while those who have no such capacity are not philosophers and are lost in multiplicity and change.

Plato, The Republic

We started an investigation of justice as existence in the previous chapter by invoking Plato's Socrates' dialogue on justice in *The Republic* with the conclusion the just man is him with the harmoniously unified soul, and the unjust man is him whose soul is in a fractured state of "civil war"—conglomerated—but after this conclusion in Book IV, Socrates goes farther, but not far enough, in claiming that "there is only one form of goodness, but an infinite variety of wickedness," because the converse is also true: goodness is in oneness, and wickedness in multiplicity.

The conglomerated soul is the one who assembles his Being antithetically from the innutritious scraps of *has-been* regurgitations—a synthetic, artificial anti-being whose essence *is not—refusal* (concerning the noun, "refuse," as in, offscouring)—much like an envious and enraged collage, and what is a collage after all but the deconstruction of the object of critique and reassembly of the same—the crystallization of ashes. Repeat this process for several generations and you are left with the

mangled corpse of history—a Frankenstein's monster of Being and identity which exponentially separates itself from what *is* into what *is not*. This is decadence—a castle of sand—an inflated, inorganic deconstruction—too tall, supported by fragile materials, precariously balanced, and hollow—a wall "plastered with untampered mortar."

The conglomerated soul, unlike God, the "I am", who may summarily define himself as Being and Being alone, must recursively define itself as an assemblage of one thousand different *am-nots*. The antagonistic soul is inherently conglomerated. At its portal, the antagonist *is not* and *will not*, i.e. "I am not," i.e. non-being. This existentiality digs nauseously and in vain for substantial essence in the ashes of Nothingness as if to console itself with self-deceptive interpretations of voided non-entities to uphold its inherent desire for Nothingness against the chaotic nihilism which tortures it. The result is negation, or rather, Being negated as an object of definition by the void, e.g. "I am not a vegetable"—nullification. The pursuit of a positive essence or Being from a collection of *not-isms*—Nothingnesses or non-essences—is impossible, as if one could reach a definition of "man" from *not* vegetable, *not* insect, *not* bird, *not* etc., but this is the best that non-being can achieve. This is the heart of Nietzsche's critique on the weak brand of Christianity which he witnessed in his day—those "sheep," as he saw them, were not the courageous, joyful, more-than-conquering valours whom Christ was and sought to effect in mankind, but whose so-called spirituality was nothing more than a refusal—

granted, a refusal toward disobedience, i.e. a failure to transcend the law, thus remaining in bondage and death—the legalist—but we digress.

Let us describe the portal of the unary soul—Being—as a contrast against the conglomerated. Why is it that “God is one”—“I Am”—while the demoniac proclaims, “My name is Legion: for we are many”? The essential object of the action of Being is creation, as we have said, the existing one—the justified, heroic, conscious, protagonistic subject who *is*—has his heroism from the assertion of his own existence and of his knowledge upon [...]; this is faith = creation. Knowledge here is not the scientific examination of existence, for then a knowledgeable subject could not pre-exist the world, which is not the case, as it is written, “I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge...” but this is a proverb for epistemology to prove, which we accept as given. What we seek is an understanding of the relationship between the characters of the heroic unary and villainous—antagonistic—conglomerated souls and the world; for the former, it is a matter of existence (specifically, Being), for the latter, of interpretation, because Being need not define itself—it is quintessentially complete apart from the world because it pre-exists creation. For instance, it is redundant for God to descriptively qualify his existence as, “I am blue,” or “green,” etc., because “God *is*” namely, “light.” Again, one senses the exasperation in Paul’s description of love: it is patient, kind, trusting, hopeful, etc.—love *is*. This mode of self-descriptive, qualifying definitions is

more suitable for *that-which-is-not*, because such a thing does not have its Being in itself but in externalities as in the reflexive object of the world; this is phenomenology and Sartre’s “transparency of consciousness,” such as when he says, “man is that which he is not.” The existentialist demoniac, not having existence in himself and therefore not pre-existing the world (his world), finds solace and meaning only in his sensual reality, thereby defining himself through his interpretation of the infinite multiplicity of worldly phenomena.

This conglomeration resulting from antagonism leads to decadence—the loss of self-control. The decadent is not himself, nor any self at all, but the negation of many. He does not know who he is but only what he is not. The antagonist will admit of his perpetual becoming—a continual transition—chiefly a transition away from and not towards. He knows that which he is turning away from because it exists—reality—and seeing existence, not liking it (not liking himself) he resists it and calls it becoming. What the antagonist is turning towards is often denoted as a “utopia,” which by its very definition does not exist. This is the nihilistic, modernist attitude that is driven by repulsion and not attraction, and latent in becoming is the prohibition on Being or existence. It is not possible that an attitude of refusal can ever produce a thing except abolition. Indeed, “there is no such thing as a positive queer identity,” because queerness is an antagonism of normalcy. What results is a botched heterogenization of many negated things. The decadent is degenerate and degenerating—continually ladening

himself with *am nots* and *will nots* as he stares into the void to be himself consumed by chaos. The more and more he deconstructs, that is, allows deconstruction to operate through him, the more he conglomerates to himself appositional relationships with reality, and the conclusion is a suicide bombing.

It is more insightful to examine this phenomenon not from the perspective of the conglomerated antagonist, but from the perspective of what he considers to be pre-existent reality, which is in fact the Nothingness of the void, although he does not consider it as such, because the nihilist esteems himself to have been thrown into the world, a world which he hates and believes hates him. The void, awaiting definition, assertion, and conquering by the hero, is present to humanity; i.e. nothing, which is essentially dark and chaotic, or rather unilluminated and unordered, is prepared for creation. We can imagine inhabiting the mind or perspective of the void characterized by non-being in every way and encountering the approach of a nihilistic first Adam. Let us temporarily place ourselves in the mind of the void. The antagonist's words are "*I am not,*" and immediately you, the void, find yourself in close association with this man—he in fact identifies with you, the void. He pronounces himself to be within your sphere of non-existence. While you know that he ought to claim his territory from you through his will-to-be and the word of faith, it seems that he instead is ready to assume your own essence of Nothingness. The more and more he declares himself "*I am not* this and that, and *I will not*

such and such," the closer he comes to the essential origin of your estate of pure non-being, and the more and more you, the void, continue to lend him your definitions or characteristics until this nihilist resembles something like a solid sphere impressed and indented with many traits of non-existence. This pierced and punctured, nihilistic orb then discovers postmodernism and begins to antagonize against himself in every way until he becomes fractured, severed, and completely disjointed; the more he deconstructs, the more you give him your definitions and inscribe your essences onto him. When he has raged and *am-notted* to the point of appearing to be like a dust cloud, he has finally achieved his purpose and attained perfect Nothingness and has completely subsumed into you, the void. He has achieved total nullification.

Contrast the synthetic multiplicity—cyberneticism—of the negatively defined, antagonistic conglomerate with the unary Being of heroism in their identities via their relationships with the world and themselves. While postmodern nihilism refuses all definitions as arbitrary and domineering, the Being of the hero is characterized by defining; he is the definer who brings forth, upholds, creates, and manifests ideals. His intrapersonal unanimity and hierarchy is implicit in the act of defining, and Aristotle's metaphysics points us to the first principle of this act of creation—its predication on Being qua being—Being as that thing for which there is nothing prior. Aristotle's proof seems sufficient to demonstrate the heroic Being's quintessentiality.

The conclusion that Being itself is inherently justified leads to some problems, namely what is evil, and who shall be saved? These become problematical in their formulation. If we take seriously the Augustinian claim, "evil = nonentity", then the immediate temptation is to simply perform linguistic gymnastics to mask mere moralization, e.g. evil = not-good, tare = not-wheat. While we understand existence to be necessarily justified in itself, we thereby remove good and evil from the equation unless Being also carries the inherent property of goodness, which might save us from the dilemma, but we already recognized by Aristotle that Being is superior to good and evil as the first principle. Let us not be accused or mistaken for making claims of amorality or immorality, as if our purposes were to excuse sin. For in our popular understanding of justice and judgment, if we were to ask who is justified then we would be operating regressively by interpreting an object for its essences and then categorizing it, which is backwards to the action of Being. Is it even reasonable to ask whether a physical object—a worldly entity—is good or evil? For instance, could you point at an instrument for abortion, a bag of schedule one drugs, or a book of pornography, and say that this object is evil? The problem concerning Justice as Existence: if it is not the case that the justification of Being rests in its goodness or non-evilness, but solely by virtue of Being, then how do we make judgements? Let us return to Christ's parables of the sower and the wheat and the tares. Let us not reopen the questions of foreknowledge, predestination, or free will, but perform an empirical investigation into God's judgment—the judgment of eternal, creative, and self-contained Being.

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

The tares have been sown by the antagonist, so the husbandman does not want them in his field. We may therefore call them evil by the assertion of Being. This is a superior ontological description of evil far and above what may be an interpretation of the pre-existent, essential, agricultural characteristics of tares which cause them to be harmful to the farmers utility or the aesthetic pleasure of the field, for would it not have been as equally antagonistic for the enemy to have planted what we would moralistically consider to be a more beneficent species of plant such as corn or pumpkins? Perhaps again, morally, this may ruin the soil's chemistry for the farmers crop rotation strategy, or perhaps the farmer predicted wheat to be fetching the highest price at harvest, and therefore another, although a useful or

beneficent species compared to tares, corn or pumpkins would steal their nutrients and thus harm his profits. In any case, we have that the farmer wanted to grow wheat and his enemy invaded his field. Why is that it in a premature harvest uprooting the tares in the field might cause the wheat to be uprooted with them? Is it owing to the close physical proximity of the seeds or sprouts that uprooting the roots of a tare would damage or destroy its neighboring wheat? Or is it the case only that in their early development the harvesters would not be able to discern between wheat and tare? Either way the wheat must not be disturbed. The farmer will have what he sowed. In both parables in this chapter of Matthew, there's an air of what may be called predeterminacy which is hard to avoid but let us not think about it in that terminology. Unless by an act of alchemy, the wheat *is* what it *is*, namely that which the farmer has sown and shall be produced although it is perhaps identical in its seedness to tares. Whatever moralistic qualities may be associated with the farmer and the wheat, and surely we are meant to understand that wheat is good, and tares are evil, the ontological description of the tares is this: they *are not* what the farmer sowed. Before we are charged with a blanketed "Predetermination" ethic, extend this analysis to the second, similar parable.

Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no

root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Here another factor is explicitly introduced into the equation: not all that the sower sowed shall produce. Some of the seeds which we might understand as being good are in fact destroyed or fail to grow, but we are nevertheless told that the farmer achieves his intended outcome: he receives a crop of thirty, sixty, or one hundred-fold. Must we formulate a single description to accommodate both parables? Perhaps not. In the second parable there's no immediately identifiable dichotomous object against which to compare the so-called good seeds, only that they either produce or they do not—the wheat either *is* or *is not*, so there is hardly a judgment to be made by the farmer who shall simply reap his harvest where it exists.

When we properly subjugate good and evil beneath the inherent justification of Being, the issue is not whether wheat and tares as plants meet some botanical criteria, but whether they were or were not planted by the farmer, or in the case of the second parable, merely their existence as grown wheat. But how do we extend this into those previously mentioned objects which somehow relate to corresponding laws which we might say are evil considering our hypothesis that Being is inherently justified? Not the Heideggerian conception of being, but of the creative, heroic, world-making protagonist.

Without going totally into a scriptural exegesis on the priesthood of Christ, redemption, and the new creation, there may be room here for a phenomenological insight into the relationship between Being and good and evil in the world, which is beyond interpretation or comparison, but does not amoralize. What is creation but the imposition of one's essence, i.e. definition (the Word)? We know that the unary Being is not divided against itself but is one, therefore how could that which is antagonistic to his own Being manifest in his world anything except what is at odds with the hero? The heroic definition and assertion are conquerings or dominations over non-entity and Nothingness, which may explain why, as the scripture says, "the last enemy to be destroyed is death"—death, which has the quality of Nothingness, is a non-being. So we see that the void—evil—and it's undominated state of non-existence is only that which has not yet been defined by the hero, which is why the fullness of Being such as the fully illuminated wanderer—the eternal Being—inhabits Paradise—the fully realized world of heroism.

Part II:

Analytic

The Aesthetic of Non-Existence

A joke is now seen to be a psychological factor possessed of power: its weight, thrown into one scale or the other, can be decisive... In the service of cynical and sceptical purposes, it shatters respect for institutions and truths in which the hearer has believed, on the one hand by reinforcing the argument, but on the other by practising a new species of attack.

Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious

A man is an artist to the extent to which he regards everything that inartistic people call 'form' as the actual substance, as the 'principal' thing.

Nietzsche, Will to Power

*This comedy is not profound.
I'm not so sure it's even sound.
Our author sends you his excuses.
He says life's hard, the world obtuse is,*

*And he most gladly would display
His gifts in any other way,
The only question is: who'd pay?
Attribute then to lack of money
His condescending to be funny.
Can he expect a warm reception?
If so, he'll be a rare exception.
This age to sour contempt is quicker,
To twisted smile, malignant snicker.
The virtues that did thrive of yore,
D'you think we'll see them anymore?*

*Machiavelli, The Mandrake*⁷⁹

In Borges' story, "Averroes's Search," a 12th century Islamic philosopher, Averroes, is attempting to translate Aristotle, but "two doubtful words had halted him at the very portals of the *Poetics*. Those words were 'tragedy' and 'comedy.'" According to Aristotle, art is either "serious or mean; it represents men that are either better or worse than the norm.... Homer, for example, deals with the better sort of men... and tragedy stands in the same relation of difference to comedy." Aristotle goes on to give other characteristics of these two categories, for instance: "Tragedy is purposeful, having magnitude; uttered in heightened language; its events are terrifying and pitiful... Comedy has to do with what is funny—an aspect of ugliness." Aristotle also distinguishes "epic" as a third genre of art, and argues for the supremacy of epic

over tragedy, while Plato's Socrates in his expulsion of the poets relegates tragedy and comedy as being over representational—a mode, he says, that often encourages the imitation of evil men, whereas the beneficently utilitarian genre of heroic proceeds in the mode of "simple narration" which, he argues, is becoming for a just education. (Those elements which Aristotle and we commonly associate with tragedy—lamentation and fear—are entirely useless for instruction and actually harmful when imitated, according to Plato.) The whole of *Poetics* may be summarized as the differences between "tragic" and "comic" art regarding matter, subject, and method. Aristotle's generic descriptions may have been accurate at the time, but have since been eclipsed, transformed, and shifted, however the genres themselves have not been; we invoke them here as starting points to trace their progression (or rather regression) and existentialist bastardization.

Aesthetics—from the Greek *aisthetikos*, meaning "perception" or "senses" (as also in "anesthetic")—is the philosophy of beauty as concerns art, but what is art? Art is the materialization of the ideal—the realization of the yet-undisclosed—the bringing-into-being via technique. Aristotle's "matter, subject, and method" is also useful here but let us reconfigure them according to his definitions in *Physics*: method (technique) is not a property of the artistic object itself, but an activity of the

⁷⁹ See Ruprecht's "We Never Got the Joke"

artist (a single result can be apprehended with different techniques); the subject (of-what) is the thing being represented—the ideal—we shall call the of-what of a piece of art its substance; for Aristotle, matter is the physical material which composes an object, but this is too limiting; define “form” to be technique applied to matter, or the arrangement of matter. This is a reinterpretation of Aristotle’s categorization of poetic principles by those which he posits in *Physics*, where he says that a substance is composed of form and matter. In summary: an artwork’s substance—its idyllic representation or content—is effected by the technique which an artist uses to formally compose matter, be it paint, ink, marble, or soundwaves. For example, the fourth movement of Bach’s Violin Partita no. 2, is claimed by some to be a tombeau—from the French *tomb*—a musical commemoration of a dead person—which would be its substance, while “chaconne” is its form.⁸⁰ Regardless of how we may have mangled Aristotle’s definitions (and we are far away the first to do so), what we have done here is the work that Nietzsche could not be bothered to do (or probably, rather, wanted his reader to do himself) in explaining Aphorism 818 of *Will to Power*: “A man is an artist to the extent to which he regards everything that inartistic people call ‘form’ as the actual substance, as the ‘principal’ thing.” Sir Roger

⁸⁰ “The subject of a Bach fugue seems to develop of its own accord, filling musical space and moving logically towards closure. But it is not an exercise in mathematics. Every theme in Bach is pregnant with emotion, moving with the rhythm of the listener’s inner life. Bach

Scruton, to whom we shall return later, says that “poetry communicates truths about our condition, not through abstract thought but through concrete feeling”, but for a more poignant insight into Nietzsche’s aphorism we turn to his theory of music; according to Scruton, music is an abstract art, not to be appreciated for its subject matter or what it represents, but the technical construction of its form itself, which is at the heart of Nietzsche’s meaning: for the true artist and connoisseur, art is not significant for its content or substance, but in the experience we have of its form.

Form and technique are utilities for the modernist artist which are “good” to the extent that they can be utilized in service to representational substance—the opposite of Nietzsche’s formulation which describes the true artist as prioritizing technique over that which is represented. “Contemplation”—“the life of intellect”—for Aristotle, is perfect happiness and the highest activity, because it is that which is pursued for its own sake, all other lower sciences being those which are studies for the sake of something else. For this reason, “craft” or practical application, is a lower philosophy in the arts, if it is a philosophy at all—a temptation which would draw young men away from the contemplative life into utilitarianism, as if to pilfer and exploit artistic philosophy. In mapping this reasoning onto the world of art, we may

is taking you into an imaged space and presenting you in that space with the image of your own fulfillment.” Roger Scruton, “Point of View: Art Today.”

distinguish between two types of artists, or rather, between the true or higher artist and the mere “crafter”: the true artist is concerned with the first causes or most principal philosophies of artistic technique and form, whereas the mere crafter is concerned with their applications—substance. This is the distinction which Nietzsche draws between the artist and “inartistic people”; the artist is concerned with form qua form, “as the principal thing,” whereas inartistic people (crafters) are concerned with producing a representative object of substance. Again, Aristotle writes, “he who chooses to know for the sake of knowing will choose most of all that which is most truly knowledge.” Owens writes, “the higher and more general the causes known, the ‘wiser’ a person is considered. Moreover, the term ‘Wisdom’ is applied more especially to knowledge that has no immediate bearing on practical utility.” Thus, the true artist asks, how can I improve my technique? While the crafter asks, how much currency will this statement fetch in the marketplace of politics? To rephrase 818: Those who regard substance over form are inartistic.

So what? To materialize the ideal essence of the world through and in form is the work of the artist, and the truest, best, most fundamental (or perhaps highest) essence of virtue can only be achieved through the most refined or perfected technique which produces the most sophisticated form. Existentialist art—modern art—is not concerned with the technical capacity of an artistic medium, necessarily by its deconstruction of form which is also caused by its Stockholm Syndromic concern for

negative representation. We will make a contrast between the substantial *am-not-ness* of existentialist will-to-Nothingness and its effect on form with the beauty of classical artworks which may be treating with the same theme, but the former doing so negatively and the latter positively, later (in fact, this shall be the structure of the remainder of this essay following this chapter). The deconstructive imperative of existentialist modernism necessitates a pre-existent world of brute-substance, that is, the Aristotelean substance = form and matter, i.e. there must be *some thing* for the modernist to refute or behave appositionally against. Where the true artist seeks to disclose the ideal essence, the modern artist seeks to destroy or absurdify material reality, because there is no such thing as a negative essence except Nothingness, i.e. nothing has the property of Nothingness because every *thing* has some property, therefore there is no ideal essence which the existential artist may materialize, only *not-that*—Nothingness. Thus, the existentialist artist must by necessity begin his artistic endeavor in the realm of the substantial—the opposite of Nietzsche’s definition of the true artist. Plato’s Socrates asserts that in his ideal republic, the only art which may be allowed is that which serves the purpose of educating and instilling its citizens with virtue; he thus demands that, for songs, “the words determine the form.” Plato’s Socrates also places substance before form in *The Republic* because for him the telos of art is its political utility, not art qua art unless art = beauty. Now, can there be such a thing as a technique of

deconstruction? No, because for antagonists, technique—formalization—must follow the substantial representation of non-being, which creates only anti-technique. This we will see empirically by observing the “technique” of modernist art, which is nothing more than a deconstruction or reaction against beautiful form. We will go on to investigate examples of this later but let us return to the implications for comedy and tragedy.

As much as the antagonistic nature of the aesthetic of non-being for both tragedy and comedy is essentially the same—anti-technique qua deconstruction—so it is with heroism—at its end, the difference is only a matter of degree, but at its heart, the materialization of the ideal is a celebration, and an attempt to describe the difference between tragedy and comedy comes down to emotion, as it does in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, insofar as a funeral and a birthday are essentially the same thing—a celebration of the person—only the former provokes sadness, and the latter happiness. The differences in emotional effects of our response to the experience of an ideal essence through the form of an artwork are merely substantial, and in this way both genres can be subsumed under the umbrella of a different taxonomy: heroism—a formal celebration of the ideal—and its non-existent counterpart, antagonism—the deconstruction of substance qua deconstruction. To reiterate: the difference between comedy and tragedy writ large is a matter of substantial effect and not of form. This is clearly seen in parodies, which maintain the same techniques but change the substance and produce opposite effects through their uncanniness. For instance, anybody beginning to learn poetry might start by associating

certain metrical feet with their supposed necessary effects, e.g. trochee with despair, unnaturalness, etc., but this is only the amateur approach, as Emerson writes in *Poetry*, “For it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem... the thought is prior to the form” (the thought, for Emerson, was Nothingness). Which is to say, the ideal essence dictates the technique which is required to manifest itself, and emotion is not an essence, but a reaction—if it were essential, then it is only accidental or transient, otherwise we call something which has the permanent description of “being sad” as “depressed” or some other neuroticism. So, depression is perhaps an ideal essence, but sadness is not. Regardless, the same technique may produce different reactions depending on the content of the representational substance. Thus, art is not something which is appreciated emotionally, but contemplatively, and comedy and tragedy cannot properly be understood or utilized in terms of their emotional effect, but all true artwork is heroic—it celebrates the ideal.

Comedy—A Defense of Vivaldi

Comedy is to bring the capricious, whimsical, frivolous, and exorbitant essence of an object into the material world—to highlight the ridiculous in form—what Aristotle called, the “ludicrous”—which he connotes as “a subdivision of the ugly”—an imitation of “meaner men”—this qualification of the character of comedy is disagreeable. The celebration of the ecstatic, superfluous, and wonderful essences of objects—ideals—is the work of the comedian. Before positively

describing comedic art, first let us first examine the hijacked term by antagonists for what commonly passes as comedy proper. Aristotle goes far in the way of a conglomerated, phenomenal description of comedy, but it amounts to no more than a bastardization paramount to the works of the worst offenders which followed him. This inverted, sensual, antagonistic conception of the comedic is no more than mere humor covering the same material deconstruction by all non-beings. Consider the archetypal humorist, Mark Twain. Twain is not comedic, but merely humorous; he lampooned, harassed, denounced, attacked, condemned, mocked, and criticized. Twain was a ribildrist and a jester, and pervading the whole work of such ribaldry is the odor of bitter, jealous antagonism. Beneath the mask of the mere humorous is *indeed* an ugly snarl—as Aristotle writes—that at its root seeks deconstruction, whose goal is not to expose, as in a revelation or disclosure, but to bring into absurdity. You can imagine the disfigured laughing faces watching *The Merchant of Venice* or reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and reveling in the deconstruction of civil life and participating in their shared hatred with the authors of *that-which-is*, as if grimacing in agreement and saying, “Yes, let this *not be!* This humorous attack brings me satisfaction!”; this is the attitude of all deconstructive art, and in this way, there is inherently no distinction between the bastardized, antagonistic classifications of tragic and comic, only that the humorist cloaks his disdain in wit and laughter. For example, the most popular stand-up comedians—who should be called ribildrists—are they who stand on stage and rail against reality—the most hateful and critical are the most successful—elicit the most sympathy—

because they are most connected with the portal of the antagonistic souls of their audience—*am not* and *will not*. This so-called comedic artistry similarly exalts substance over form, i.e. is political, and therefore trades on social criticism. All of Mark Twain’s novels are overfull of spiteful lambasts—pessimism par excellence; if he is celebrated for an innovation of form, it would be for his colloquialism, but what is this colloquialism except the conglomeration of the sensual world a la Emerson? But this same device of colloquialism was also employed by Shakespeare. Twain does not ask, how do I improve the comedic form of a novel? but, how do I criticize the hardest? And what is criticism but the interpretation of the pre-existent world? The beginning and end of a joke is Nothingness. Freud in his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (underscored with his generic theory that that which is repressed is subliminally signaled) says that a meaningful joke—“tendentious,” as compared to the “abstract”—is “in the service of the purpose of exposure, and of hostile, cynical and sceptical purposes... Brutal hostility, forbidden by law, has been replaced by verbal invective.” To joke is to reduce to absurdity. All jokes are antagonistic and therefore are absurdifications. Joking has long been the hallmark of so-called comedy, but at least Mark Twain has the decency to denote himself a humorist.

To draw a distinction between the true form of comedy as a heroic celebration of the whimsical and capricious versus the bastardized form of so-called comedy as an antagonistic deconstruction or absurdification of *that-which-exists* is our aim, and we shall proceed in this section towards that aim via a defense of Antonio Vivaldi.

First, briefly, to defend or define whimsy and caprice, naturally, as essences of God or Being; the old man wrought with the scars of tribulation most easily appreciates the gravity and austerity of God, but a child is most attuned to His whimsy, so far as he knows how to burst into ecstatic hilarity at the most innocuous of objects such as a keyring, and unhesitatingly accepts the ridiculousness of the most frivolous creations such as giraffes, fly traps, and Saturn. The hard-hearted elder may forget or fail to appreciate God's caprice, but the angels did not, as "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" at God's creation, and neither did Vivaldi, who, with the healthy palate of a child, when God dangled the keyring of "Winter" above his eyes, responded with a comedic celebration of its whimsy, but when we remember that through the petrification of age an appreciation of true comedy becomes something one must fight to retain, it is easy to understand why Roger Scruton, listening to the wonderful work of Vivaldi, can errantly conclude that while "Bach greatly admired Vivaldi because of his accomplishments... did he have anything to say compared to what Bach was saying?"⁸¹ We only wonder when Scruton stopped laughing at the proverbial keyring, or first balked at the giraffe.

Antonio Vivaldi (March 4, 1678 – July 28, 1741), born in Venice to the son of an orchestral violinist, was trained

for the priesthood into which he was ordained in 1703. At the same time, Vivaldi had become an excellent violinist, and due to a chronic illness, rather than continuing in the traditional form of ministry, spent the rest of his professional life as a violin maestro, instructor, impresario, and composer, publishing his first sonatas in 1705. "Vivaldi perfected the form of what would become the classical three-movement concerto... [which was] taken as models of form by many late Baroque composers, including Johann Sebastian Bach... and often anticipates" Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.⁸² Vivaldi ended his career with a corpus of over five hundred concerti, ninety sonatas, and fifty operas. Philips summarizes Vivaldi's achievements:⁸³

Vivaldi was the composer who greatly extended the range of emotions and effects to be achieved with [music]... In Vivaldi, the soloist(s) typically introduce new material, creating a journey of thematic invention and development that was imitated and enlarged throughout the baroque period, and eventually evolved into the classical concerto of Mozart and Beethoven. Vivaldi... provided the model for J. S. Bach's orchestral music... The Four Seasons is a vivid narrative of natural imitation accompanied with corresponding sonnets of Vivaldi's own composition.

⁸¹ "Beauty and Desecration"

⁸² Talbot: Encyclopedia Britannica - Biography of Vivaldi

⁸³ *The Classical Music Lover's Companion to Orchestral Music*

Below is Vivaldi's sonnet for "Spring":

La Primavera (Spring)
Opus 8, No. 1, in E Major

I. Allegro—

*Festive Spring has arrived,
The birds salute it with their happy song.
And the brooks, caressed by little Zephyrs,
Flow with a sweet murmur.
The sky is covered with a black mantle,
And thunder, and lightning, announce a storm.
When they are silent, the birds
Return to sing their lovely song.*

II. Largo e pianissimo sempre—

*And in the meadow, rich with flowers,
To the sweet murmur of leaves and plants,
The goatherd sleeps, with his faithful dog at his side.*

III. Danza pastorale. Allegro—

*To the festive sound of pastoral bagpipes,
Dance nymphs and shepherds,
At Spring's brilliant appearance.*

The bird chirps beautifully and it knows that it does. It flippantly and carelessly lavishes its song on the world and says, "beloved creatures, you are welcome to my gracious melody! I will sustain my celebration and invite you too until you learn to cast off your shyness and revel along in my celebration. Join in this circus—fantastic carnival. You are not too old to enjoy my gift. It seems good to me that I should fill the air with my song, and tomorrow when the thunderstorm comes, I will hide from the sky's brief, impetuous wrath, and afterward I will once

again comfort heaven with the song of my delights." The repetitive bird song of Vivaldi's "Spring" is the creature's unapologetic enjoyment of its blessedness—the childlike relish of its own beautiful capacity for imitative expression.

Let us unpack Scruton's statement that what differentiates Bach and Vivaldi is that Vivaldi had nothing to say, for the several assumptions contained in it. First, in claiming that which differentiates the two, we might say that this is *only* what distinguishes the one from the other, namely, having something to say, i.e., in making this comparison, Scruton acknowledges that Vivaldi and Bach are equally masterful in the technicalities of the baroque form despite the myths of Bach being able to improvise a fugue in six voices, unless we adumbrate the art of *saying something* as implicit in one's artistic technical capabilities, which would be to say that meaning is an aspect of the formal, which is clearly false given that the substance of music is its emotional effect. Next in Scruton's statement is his advocacy for the superiority of Bach to Vivaldi based on the fact of his supposedly having something to say while Vivaldi does not, and here we have the assumption that great art necessitates having something to say. Now one may easily note the difference in one's emotional listening experience between Bach and Vivaldi—the former often tends toward eliciting emotions of grief, gloom, and morbidity, while the latter, exuberance, glee, and light-heartedness, and it is not clear to me why no one should evaluate the say-something-ness of a piece based on the apparent inferiority of the emotion of Vivaldi below Bach, but where else may one look for the

meaningfulness of lyricless music if not in its form or emotion? As we noted, Scruton perhaps contradicts his evaluation of Vivaldi in asserting that music is an abstract art, not to be appreciated for its subject matter or what it represents, but the technical construction of its form itself. Granting that each artist is as technically skilled as the other, or at least that Vivaldi possesses a mastery of the baroque form comparable to Bach, and that meaning in music can be relegated solely to its technical composition, but that the emotional potency of both cannot be denied, it must be that Scruton finds the emotional comedy of Vivaldi meaningless. What a shame.

Whence then arises this failure of appreciation for the significance of true comedy as I have claimed that Vivaldi exemplifies?⁸⁴ The roots of the bastardization of this side of the emotional spectrum of artistic representation begins with Aristotle and culminates in Shakespeare, so it is no wonder that Scruton being nursed in this Freudian joke-of-hostility of modernist antagonism could not see true comedy in Vivaldi when his definition of comedy arises from the Aristotelian-Shakespearean tradition of jesting ugliness. The ugly jester which is modern comedy is nothing more than nihilistic absurdity, as if in the beginning of God's creation all the angels we're jeering, mocking, and lampooning his work—thumbing their noses at Saturn. Shakespeare's comedy is as much of a

⁸⁴ Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* may be the most hilarious work of orchestral comedy. Even Mozart at his most serious and mature cannot cast off his green gladness at frivolity. Consider the first movement of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 3, with its sprite,

grotesque abortion as Euripides' *Heracles*, to be discussed later—a deconstruction with, as Freud says, the purpose of exposing, which exposure is not a bringing into light, such as a revelation, but with the same meaning that Plato wrote of “exposing” defective babies to the elements in a eugenic Spartan infanticide. The modernist comedian, the ugly jester, sets himself to the task of lampooning the pre-existent entity into the void—the realm of absurdity. The “butt of the joke,” as it were is, for the antagonist, what is to be absurdified, such as when Seinfeld jests, “what's the deal with airline food?” Now substitute airline food with any *thing* to understand Freud's critique on joking which is the modernist mode of comedy writ large and of Shakespeare, e.g. “what's the deal with marriage?” This is the tradition which Roger Scruton was trained in, and the reason why he is numb to Vivaldi.

Tragedy—A Contestation of Shakespeare

Shakespeare, I see, now there is a man who knows how *to hate*! He hated well with a pure, envious hatred. He hated men, women, government, and all things which were superior to himself—essentially, Shakespeare was a democrat. His plays are thinly veiled attacks. His technique is *disguise*. All pseudo-tragedians, in the manner of Shakespeare, are similarly nihilistic, and modern literature thereafter, with too few exceptions,

ornamental tremolos and trills by the soloist's charming overconfidence toward the orchestra. As Vengerov says, one must not play Mozart while frowning (of whose sixty symphonies only two are in minor key).

adopts the same mind—antagonize the world.⁸⁵ Sartre provides these antagonizers with their philosophical justification—reality, including the self, the *ego*, is inessential, and its nature is Nothingness, therefore, anything that purports *to be* is lying and must be brought down—deconstructed, abolished, criticized, condemned, lampooned, mocked—annihilated. Shakespeare was an annihilator *par excellence*, and modern artists have followed lockstep—Caesar and Brutus, Duncan and Macbeth, Claudius and Hamlet; they all suffer the same fates—they are all refuted. Even the history plays, not coincidentally the first plays that Shakespeare published, which are the least blatantly farcical or flatly representative of immorality with their quasi-heroic depictions of great men, all contain a pungent undercurrent of cynicism.

For an example of a positive celebration of fearful languor and enraged madness: Shostakovich's "String Quarter Number 8"—dedicated "in the memory of the victims of fascism and war,"⁸⁶ a beautiful composition which achieves the maintenance of an orderly structure in the face of the void. It opens with counter-pointal, self-contained, four-note phrasing which resolves on the dominant chord. The emotional effect is not produced through a deconstruction of classical form, but by using the mathematical order of a double-layered, Jewish folk music inspired theme that materializes the ideal of resistance through totalitarianism as each instrument's

⁸⁵ Yoko Ono, for example, having no musical talent but some name recognition, capitalizes not on the creation of music, but the deconstruction of it through antagonism.

voice takes turns reaching out from the sorrowful counter-pointal sea before a synchronized, Blitzkrieg eruption into a *molto allegro* "attacca" where *sforzando-fortississimo* abounds. The cello turns the *ostinato* from the first section into a momentous juggernaut which propels the violins into an echoing frenzy like water droplets dancing on top of a scorching pan. The quartet then takes turns, three playing the synchronized down beat while the fourth frantically attempts to overcome the fateful advance of the emphatic, "very, very loud" double stops. The abrupt dynamic shifts, the reemergence of the motif in the cello and viola while the violins play triplets, and finally, the heroic first violin escapes and melodizes alone before celebrating its victory with a waltz, but the villainous treble and bass still lurk in the antagonizing shadows. The fourth section, *largo*, a recapitulation of the first but this time with dotted half notes, has the instruments in a consonant rhythm—the individual and his world have become entangled and indistinguishable—where is the voice of the hero? Where has he gone? Bar fifty-eight—*poco espresso*—the first violin begins to reemerge after forty-five beats of a slurred G from his existential union with the primordial Nothing of the world and finds, if even a *pianissimo*, a melodic individual voice—the heroic hope of post-existential disentanglement and the assertive self. He laments, but he *is*—the herculean rise from the

⁸⁶ Internationale Schostakowtsch Tage Gohrsich

underworld. The non-existent world of the treble and bass again seek enclosure—to synchophonically subsume the subject, but alas—absurdity, absurdity!—the end of the section, eight bars of silence save for the first violin; he *is!* Again, *attacca!* And the fight continues...

In Plato's exile of the poets, Socrates reaches the conclusion that the dramatic poet is skilled not in the knowledge of the subjects that he represents but in appealing "to the taste of the ignorant multitude." In brief, his reasoning rests on the contradiction that if "a man could produce both the original and the copy" then why would he "seriously want to devote himself to the manufacture of copies and make it the highest object in life?" E.g., if Shakespeare truly had a mastery of the knowledge of the skill of kingship, then why would he settle for making mere representations when "his reputation and effectiveness would both be greater" by assuming an actual throne? There is no political coalition or royal dynasty of Shakespeareanism, but there is rather a cult of Shakespearean poets who imitate a mimic and thus propagate an "art of representation...that has no serious value," except to gorge the worst part of the souls of "the ignorant masses," namely the "many-headed sort of beast, with heads of wild and tame animals all round it"—passion—it is "never tired of bemoaning [our sufferings]" and produces "luxury and effeminacy" by eliciting pitiful whimperings at the plight of third-degree-misrepresented unjust men (and women in general), so it is no wonder that modernity celebrates

this Babylonian herald of anarchy—Shakespeare, the benchmark of so-called erudition among the acolytes of recalcitrance—the blonde beasts—who, progenitor and progeny, mistake license for freedom, subversion for justice, and appearance for reality.

Socrates appears to prophesy the anti-men of Shakespeare's plays:

The dramatic poet will not therefore naturally turn to [the reasonable] element [of the soul], nor will his skill be directed to please it, if he wants to win a popular reputation [among his motley audience]; but he will find it easy to represent a character that is unstable and refractory.

The conglomerated souls of antagonists find themselves at home in Shakespeare's faux world of ugly jesters and nihilistic autocannibals. The womanish lamentations of miserable men are cloaked in the tempting bait of lush language that threatens to defuse the self-discipline of the audience and spur them to imitation, such as Hamlet's poo-poo over "poor Yorick!" and Macbeth's existential "and tomorrow, [etc.]."

Roger Scruton inadvertently attempts to rescue the modernist conception of tragedy from nihilism by saying, "sometimes we desire that which is bad for us, and art can show the negative consequences of fulfilling those desire," or put another way, modernist tragic art shows us how *not to be*, or what *not to do*. Thus, how can it be imitated? Considered it moralistically à la Plato, the

modern artist does not paint a positive image worthy of imitation; he only says, *not this*. It is a negative representation—as in, it negates—a supposed immoral or useless way of Being. If we accept the platonic notion of art as a mode of education, then this antagonistic, negative, non-being method of representation is erroneous, and yet it is ubiquitous. We physically punish a child for transgressing, but without a positive role model to demonstrate righteousness, the punishment is futile. Seen another way, the law with its ten *do-not* commandments brings death, as Paul says, but Christ preached, “follow me”—do as I do, or more truthfully, *be as I am*. The law, and the antagonism of deconstructive representation—modernist tragedy (Shakespeare)—reproduces non-beings.

Let us outline the argument which Plato’s Socrates gives in *The Republic* concerning the stylistic requirements of stories, beginning with several premises:

- 1) Because children are “easily moulded and... any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark” it is necessary to “supervise the production of stories, and
- 2) “dramatic and similar representations, if indulgence in them is prolonged into adult life, establish habits of physical poise, intonation and thought which become second nature,” and

- 3) the good man “will refuse with disgust to model himself on characters which his judgement despises as lower than his own...”

Underlying Socrates’ thinking is the concept of *mimeses* or imitation; “all poetical imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, and the knowledge of their true nature is the only antidote to them.” The phenomenon of *mimeses* is not only the locus of art, which imitates nature, but also characterizes the relationship between the reader and the poetry being read—from the evil of other men something of evil is communicated to the reader—there is an internalization and identification on the part of the reader with the characters and the world being represented in a poem, what Socrates calls, “representative style.” There is, however, for Socrates a problem with poetry as a representative art form itself, which is based on the classical platonic conception of the hierarchy of reality: there is the true reality of immutable forms, and the apparent reality of the senses. Combine this formulation with representation to get this model using his example of a bed:

- 1) The Highest Truth of “Bed”—Made by God as a form, i.e. the idea of “bed”
- 2) The 1st Degree Remove of “Bed”—that which is made by a carpenter as a bed
- 3) The 2nd Degree Remove of “Bed”—depicted by a painter

4) The 3rd Degree Remove of “Bed”—imitated by a poet in language

Therefore, “The tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth.”

The problem here is, as we mentioned in Socrates’ definition of justice, that men can only specialize in one job and become experts in that thing, but a poet, who is an expert in the technique of poetry, cannot also be an expert in all the things that he represents: “all the arts and all things human, virtue as well as vice, and divine things too.” So, his representation is not only imitating the mere appearance of things, but he must necessarily do so poorly. (“The imitator or maker of the image knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearances only.... The imitative art is an inferior who marries an inferior, and has inferior offspring.”) On the whole, Socrates is intolerant of any poetry at all being allowed in his state (“let [the defenders of poetry] show that not only she is pleasant but also useful to the State and to human life,” and “we shall be right in refusing to admit [the tragic and comic poet] into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason.”), but especially those sorts which do not educate, or worse, teach vice, such as the Shakespearean form of tragedy: “[Tragedy] which inclines us to recollection of our troubles and to lamentation...we may call irrational, useless, and

cowardly.” Here is Plato’s Socrates definitive condemnation of Shakespearean tragedy:

When we listen to a passage of Homer, or one of the tragedians, in which he represents some pitiful hero who is drawling out his sorrows in a long oration, or weeping, and smiting his breast—the best of us, you know, delight in giving way to sympathy, and are in raptures at the excellence of the poet who stirs our feelings most...

But when any sorrow of our own happens to us, then you may observe that we pride ourselves on the opposite quality—we would fain be quiet and patient; this is the manly part, and the other which delighted us in the recitation is now deemed to be the part of a woman...

Now can we be right in praising and admiring another who is doing that which any one of us would abominate and be ashamed of in his own person?

Socrates therefore demands that poetry justify itself on these charges, but he may not be so intolerant as this dialogue from Boox X may appear, because although taking place perhaps as a progression from a similar discussion, he gives in Book III some stylistic criteria which might bring “tragedy and comedy”—commonly overly-emotional in their bastardized forms, being successful only so far as they gain approbation from the mass of uncultivated plebians—into the realm of utility to

the state and out of the realm of pandering vice and flattering the masses (Shakespeare). The solution that ought to sever the link between the third-degree removed misrepresentation based on appearances from the human inclination towards imitation is through a “simple narrative” instead of “representation,” which is easily understood through an example, which is the method that Socrates uses to explain it:

Representation

Frida said, “I am wearied of this miserable life of injustice!”

Robin replied, “Let bitterness fill our souls while we deconstruct all reality!”

Simple Narration

Frida said that she is a miserable prawn.

Robin responded with an advocacy for Satanism.

While some liberty was taken in the translation to simple narration, the difference in the reading or listening experience is that the reader no longer subconsciously identifies with the speaker, but distances himself from them. The other criteria for perhaps acceptably reintroducing the banished poets from the state is, as previously mentioned, moral guardrails for the objects being depicted, namely, virtuous heroes and an accurate God. These superficial corrections, however, as evidenced by Socrates’ return to the question seven

books later, may not be enough to redeem poetry from his inditement of it. Now, let us go on to the other half of Plato’s soul, Aristotle, to find another critique of Shakespearean tragedy and a possible point of redemption before considering the modernist, existential tragedian more generically and the merits of heroism.

Aristotle took the opposite stance as Plato’s Socrates on the issue of representations of vice in tragedy, and saw this effeminate lamentation—“tragedy should imitate actions which excite pity and fear”—to be useful as a sort of vent for those unbecoming and destructive habits—“to effect the proper purgation of these emotions.” Yet Aristotle takes this entirely for granted in two respects: 1) that a “purgation” is actually occurring, and 2) that this would be a healthy phenomenon. First, acknowledge that the modern nihilist accepts these emotions as an anti-celebration—a reveling in the mud of absurdity, as if a lamentation were a sort of devouring oneself as a means to cope with the Nothingness of one’s voided world, but also that this lamentation were the thing to be desired in itself, e.g. the modernist project of anarchy is to bring the whole race into a perpetual gnashing of teeth à la Gnosticism—the belief that matter itself is evil and that reality is an imprisonment by an antagonistic demiurge. Perhaps such an ontological framework would indeed permit a never-ending, vengeful enagement were such a system not perforce with stupidity. Aristotle is much more worthy than such villainy to be engaged with in conversation. Aristotle, like Plato, asserts both that art imitates reality, and that men

imitate art. ("[Man] is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons.") *Poetics* dedicates its content to prescribing proper artistic modes of imitation to the artist, and none to how this imitation on behalf of the viewer of art takes place. The effect of purging improper emotions is only an assumption, and Raney and Bryant do the work of exposing its error:⁸⁷

The Catharsis Doctrine... rests on the notion that individuals are able to release pent-up frustrations, hostilities, and desires vicariously through viewing others...According to the catharsis doctrine, viewers watching violent sports films such as *Gladiator* or *Rocky* should hypothetically purge any pent-up bloodlust, and thus, exposure to fictional sports violence should result in decreased hostility on the part of the viewer. However, precious little empirical evidence exists to support this theory. Zillmann argued that catharsis is fraught with numerous conceptual difficulties, and, in fact, an abundance of evidence exists to contradict the doctrine. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of empirical research has demonstrated that exposure to violent entertainment is positively correlated with increased aggression, contrary to the prediction one would expect based on the catharsis doctrine.

⁸⁷ *Handbook of Sports and Media*

Using drama as a political tool to placate the baser emotions of the masses by means of purging them through catharsis is baseless and practically untrue. Art can serve both as a political tool—propaganda—and a large portion of *The Republic* is dedicated to its regulation as such, and what's more, to the repudiation of "pity and fear." Plato's philosopher king authoritatively exiles Shakespeare with his nihilistic misrepresentations, and Aristotle offers him no redemption.

Aristotle says that the merit of an artwork may be judged on the quality of the audience to whom it appeals. For example, consider the moral differences between the average connoisseurs of classical music versus heavy metal or hip-hop to determine which genres are the most refined. If you ever wondered why Shakespeare's plays, when originally performed, usually ended in a jig, Aristotle offers an explanation:

The question may be raised whether the epic or tragic mode of imitation is the higher. If the more refined art is the higher, and the more refined in every case is that which appeals to the better sort of audience, the art which imitates anything and everything is manifestly most unrefined. The audience is supposed to be too dull to comprehend unless something of their own is thrown in by the performers, who therefore indulge in restless movements. Bad flute-players

twist and twirl, if they have to represent 'the quoit-throw,' or hustle the coryphaeus when they perform the 'Scylla.' Tragedy, it is said, has this same defect. We may compare the opinion that the older actors entertained of their successors. Mynniscus used to call Callippides 'ape' on account of the extravagance of his action, and the same view was held of Pindarus. Tragic art, then, as a whole, stands to Epic in the same relation as the younger to the elder actors. So we are told that Epic poetry is addressed to a cultivated audience, who do not need gesture; Tragedy, to an inferior public. Being then unrefined, it is evidently the lower of the two.

Underlying Shakespeare's writing is rancor and displeasure of the highest degree. Shakespeare is excellent at his craft—an adept critical theorist. Cloaking his criticism and rebellion is an enticing surface of pungent language which feels sumptuous to speak and read, but the substance of his poetry is mocking, lampooning satire, like Snow White's poisonous apple. Shakespeare is the greatest deconstructionist who hated society, religion, and the male-female order. Each of his plays is an attempt to upset tradition, i.e. what *is*. "Everything is permitted and nothing is true." Shakespeare's worlds are the result of having killed God, so it is no surprise that many of his plays end in bloody death.

Modern Art

Modern America does not produce great works of art but elaborate political statements supercharged with an antagonism to what *has-been*. The politicization of art stems from the denunciation of art itself—that is, "art" as the material expression of universal, beautiful truth—the disclosure of the as-yet unrevealed; to go further, it is the aesthetic *will* of *Being*—the (beautiful) substance of things hoped for. The subordination of art as such to the propagandic—political "art"—is the result of the nihilistic inability to foresee—to hope for—an undisclosed, beautiful truth in worldly objects, i.e. what is the essence of creative expression if not antagonism? If the telos of art is not beauty, as is obviously the case for the villainously anti-being, then the material construction of "self-expression," which for the villain is *will-not*, is an absurd antimanifestation of the void. Hence, existentialist, modernist "art" is denigrated into antagonism toward what *has-been* and what *is*, i.e. the promulgation of what *is not*.

Environmentalists, for example, do not celebrate the beauty of green earth—the positive *is* of human symbiosis—but denounce and ridicule pollution and unsustainability—the *is not* of parasitism. The environmentalist aesthetic is one of anti-being, of destruction and collapse; it is concerned with *not being*, ergo absurdity. The modern environmentalist has subjected himself to the Nothingness of the void.

Feminism, or antagonism of “woman,” and feminist art, seeks to deconstruct femininity, i.e. to construct that which *is not* feminine.⁸⁸ The positive affirmation—the ideal essences of Being—of womanhood is miscarried into the nihilistic absurdity of the negative un-ideal of the feminist’s object of criticism, namely, femininity, e.g. ideal womanhood *is not* domesticity. The feminist aesthetic is indelibly anti-being; it de-celebrates the chaotic void of anti-femininity—a Nothing; it lampoons what *has been* and *is* essential to womanhood. Why? As Mansfield says, “the gender neutral society needs to repress the inclinations that belong to one’s own sex”, which is to say, feminists *will not* that men are manly and women are womanly, or put another way, feminists *will* that men are not necessarily manly, and likewise women with womanliness; this is existential nihilism (modernity) in a nutshell: we as subjects are inessential and therefore non-existent. Phenomenally, this manifests as the feminists’ attack on manhood and womanhood, but especially the latter, e.g. “I, as a woman—that is *me* (Sartre’s “I” (subject) vs “me” (object) distinction)—*am not* womanly.” The result?: absurdity. The feminist inhabits the existential realm of Nothingness and allows herself to become the defined—or rather, undefined—object of the void characterized by chaos under the umbrella of antagonism. The feminist à la Hamlet

⁸⁸ “Modern art school teaches that “the purpose of art is not to beautify life...to give you a sense of the meaningfulness of things, but on the contrary to deconstruct those things to show that life is essentially meaningless and you can the best do this by taking the

chooses “not to be” and takes arms “against a sea of trouble, and by opposing ends them”—namely, ends femininity, more on Hamlet and his famous speech later. You might say, what about women who *will be* manly? That is not feminism; it is chauvinism—the prejudice for masculinity over femininity. The substance of the chauvinistic “manly female” as an artistic subject as opposed to the feminist “unwomanly female” is simple enough: short hair, shoulder pads, and pants, e.g. Joan of Arc, who was burned at the stake for blaspheming—she wore men’s clothing.

But what is the feminist aesthetic? It is the antagonizing chaos of deconstruction—the total abandonment of concern for form in exchange for substance, as Nietzsche says. Aristotle puts it another way but in the context of physics: “form” is the sum of properties which define an object, whereas “matter” is the sum of the literal materials which compose it. Applying Aristotle’s physical framework to Nietzsche’s artistic one, feminist art—and modern art generally—disregards the essential elements of artistic arrangements in exchange for the mere representation of objects. For an oversimple example: if Socrates falls into a vat of blue dye, then the formal, metaphysical characteristics of being “blue” are inconsequential to the modern artist as regards signification, but the substantial

human body and making it repulsive.” Roger Scruton, “Beauty and Desecration”

or material significance of being *painted* blue are thought determinative, i.e. the technique of artistry is subjugated to serve symbolic objects. One more example: the dominant pedagogy of classical instruction in musical composition asserts the fundamentality of proficiency in counterpoint (form) in order to create polyphony (substance)—advancements in classical music stem from men studying the technical form of counterpoint—the same can be said of great artists who mastered the technical aspects of their craft; the attainment of artistic genius comes not from a love for substantial representation—such as polyphony—but a love for mastering technique, which explains why Bach is said to have been able to improvise counterpoint in six voices.

To speak of the technical elements of modern art is absurd, because it is popularly political—propaganda—being wholly concerned with representation; it is only concerned with making a statement, and if it has any technique at all, it is the that of deconstruction, which is anti-art, being anti-what-has-been. Thus, a formal or artistic critique of modern art is oxymoronic; one may only analyze the ways in which it deconstructs art—the way in which it *is not*. Substantially, feminist “artwork”

⁸⁹ Consider also Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.*—or *Mona Lisa but with a mustache*. Here is Freud’s joke qua hostility—putting a mustache on the Mona Lisa to make it the “butt of the joke,” as if we have moved on from and are above such *liche* traditions. This is not a positive technique insofar as it is merely a deconstruction of *what-is*, unless you can describe Nothingness as a positive position. We are in a rush to annihilate all forms and thus beauty, leaving us as atomically

largely concerns the female body, and more particularly, female genitalia, as if to say, Will you let *this* and *these* define you? Here again is auto-cannibalistic existentialism—the Stockholm Syndromic subject captured by its object of censure—namely, the female body. In the feminist’s Sartrian attempt to extricate “self” from Being by deconstructing the female body, she annihilates self—places herself in the void with the negative assertion, I *will not be* feminine. The feminist allows herself to be (un)defined by the general, non-existent, worldly object. She desires *not to be* what *has been*; the aesthetic result flowing therefrom is an attack on artistry, for how can art, as the formal materialization of truth and beauty, *be not*? The anti-formal materialization of the ideal (Nothingness) anti-being is necessarily chaotic.

Consider⁸⁹ Frida Kahlo as a representative of the feminist aesthetic in her self-portrait, *The Face of Isolation*. The bare-breasted, teary-eyed subject, Frida (more accurately, the object of deconstruction) faces the viewer, her eviscerated body is riddled with nails and a shattered column for a spine while she sits in front of a similarly fractured landscape. To reiterate, this painting is

meaningless—merely brute-existent—nihilistic existentialism. One cannot tread too heavily on this scheme of modern art, however, for to do so would be to devalue a billion-dollar industry which trades in this anti-technique. Modern artists—ugly jesters—are simply putting a mustache on reality.

political; it is concerned with substance and representation, not form. It seeks to make a statement, ergo it is inartistic a la Nietzsche, and as such a formal analysis is a fool's errand. Here is the real question, which came first, the landscape—the world—or the deconstructed object—Frida's body? Which is asserting or defining the other? Is Frida asserting her brokenness on the landscape, or vice versa? Dismiss a mere coincidence in their essential similarity. Heidegger would answer, the subject—if you can call her that—as the interpreter of the objective reality of her fractured at-hand world, but look more closely: if the subject is interpreting the world, then the world possesses a natural essence a priori of the subject, which is to say that the world is independent of her—absurd. We have already dismissed this naturalist theory of being as fatefully determining the essence of humanity as doomed to chaos. No, Frida is not fated to pessimistic nihilism. Nevertheless, Frida is being objectified—that is to say, being defined by the world, but she is the instigator, i.e. she has *allowed* herself to become an object of definition by the void. Frida has assumed the essence of the non-existent world with her *will-not-be*, namely, female (“*damn these breasts!*”). Her negative assertion against herself leads her to the existential realm of absurdity. She *will not*? Very well, then like her world, she *is not*.

Contrast Frida Kahlo's anti-feminine self-portrait with perhaps the greatest portrait ever made—the archetypal

celebration of femininity and womanhood, and a fine work of art—da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. These paintings, viewed side by side, make Kahlo's appear downright amateurish and grotesque both in form and substance, but what separates the two subjects, Mona Lisa and Frida Kahlo? Consider Mona Lisa's background—the looming cryoliths, the hot, swooning riverbed, and the tranquil waters between them spanned by a bridge. Mona Lisa is able to order her powerful and illusive world through the assertion of her positive Being because she *is*.

“Mona Lisa, you do not understand how evil it is being a woman,” crying Frida says to the enigmatic madam.

Mona Lisa replies, “I am that I am.”

Comedy and tragedy require the triumph over Fortune by the hero—she must be “vanquished by the right kind of man,”⁹⁰ as Strauss says a la Machiavelli, i.e. wielded by the impetuous youth such as in *The Barber of Seville* or *Ferris Bueller*—comedic celebrations; even the colorful 1944 Lawrence Olivier adaptation of *Henry V* depicts the ironical rape of France by a “model Christian King” as a comedic flight on the wings of eagles. Do we consider it comedy when Fortune is vanquished by the wrong kind of man, such as Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* (“this is the day that the unjust man doth thrive” (of the character of the same name, Plato wrote, “Autolycus surpassed all men in stealing and lying”)? This is as equally a perversion of poetic justice as *Oedipus Rex*. If

⁹⁰ *Thoughts on Machiavelli*

we laugh at Autolycus, it is a sanguine laughter. Just as Plato concludes that the only poetry allowed in a just city should be that which praises the gods and good men. Thus all truly good and heroic—that is, useful—tragedy depicts endurance in the face of hardship or the sacrificial consequences of the good man's just deeds ("justice" as we have defined it), such as Brutus's inevitable death at the end of Julius Caesar after assassinating the could-be dictator, which leads to Marc Anthony's apt eulogy of the killer in the final scene, "nature might stand up and say to all the world this was a man."⁹¹ We long ago abandoned the truly tragic because we believe that, as masters of the universe being able to solve all problems having totally illuminated all of the natural causes of all life's phenomena, that pain is unjust. We believe that punishment—violence and coercion—are unnecessary because we have mastered rationality—rationality has mastered us; it is the universe which must be punished, so claims the anarchist. There's nothing unexplainable, and if there is, it is a failure of pre-existent design. There is no fog of war—no *terra incognita*. If there be dragons it is because those serpents do not yet realize that they are irrational myths. The cynic cannot comprehend the victory of being drawn and quartered. Modernism's attempted conquest over Fortune through pure reason leads to the hubris of scientism, as if all mystery can be solved through the atomic observation of the natural world sans the spirit.⁹²

⁹¹ One may read Brutus as a tragic hero if one also overlooks the myriad of his defects, such as Plato does for Achilles in censoring portions of *The Iliad*.

⁹² This critique of modernism is commonly elucidated by an interpretation of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*, wherein three men with

Through their Stockholm Syndromic obsession with the void, modernists have rationalized fear and pity, and in their embrace of them engage in a sort of self-denial and futile deconstruction; postmodern existentialists sink into a despondent lethargy as if they were crash test dummies (see Euripides' *Heracles*). We have hurdled toward polar extremes and disdained a moderate, manly gusto or solace as if there were not a time for laughing and a time for weeping; the modern artist laughs at everything, and the postmodern weeps at weeping. We have denied experience itself and cannot believe our eyes; we have gouged them out and sank totally into the realm of theory, but the heroes—the ancient ones—the present ones—the eternal ones—heroes—the men who listen and perceive, who declare and create, who *are* and *will*, and frolic and endure, are not extinct but only dormant. When these true artists reappear—and they will (if only cloaked in camel's hair)—they will either be crowned or crucified, or both.

three different approaches to killing the shark—one a brute, one a scientist, and the last a hero—each have a chance to demonstrate the virtue of their method; in short, the former two only chum the waters.

Huckleberry Finn and Ferris Bueller

In every country paupers envy respectable citizens and make heroes of unprincipled characters, hating the established order of things and hankering after innovation; discontented with their own lot, they are bent on general upheaval.

Sallust, The Conspiracy of Cataline

We move on to apply our critique of postmodern, existentialist antagonism and positive heroism to several works of literature beginning by stretching the term “literature” to include an unsuspecting character. We shall compare the titular Ferris Bueller—a hero—from John Hughes’ 1986 film, with Huckleberry Finn from Mark Twain’s 1884 novel; Huck—the critic, pessimist, scoffer, proudly “un-sivilized” anti-man, and antithesizer—cybernetic deconstructor—antagonist and villain.

All the world follows after Ferris Bueller whether they are dancing alongside his lush, childlike freedom and innocence—those things in which his spirit *is*, as the prophet Isaiah says—or whether they gnash their teeth at him; Ferris, “a righteous dude,” whose overfull Being is tangentially a condemnation and renunciation of all that *is not*—a bright light of life burning so hot that the men of the shadows—the anti-men, the conglomerates,

those who *are-not*—cannot endure him, namely Dean Rooney—the Elmer Fudd or Wiley Coyote to Ferris’ Bugs Bunny or Road Runner—and his rivalrous, envious sister—they must destroy him. Ferris requires no justification for himself. His glib facade to obscure playing hooky is merely a last-attempt invitation for the dead anti-men to participate in his transcendent, unapologetic Being, but what is Ferris’ great victory and the real drama around which the plot operates?: awakening and converting his best friend and dead, anti-man, Cameron, into the courageous life of heroism, liberated from the smoke-and-mirrors critical violence of the antithesizers. Ferris’ manly Being makes him an existent object for the deconstructors to drool over in their desire for human flesh, but more importantly, it invites Chicago to “Twist and Shout” with him as he sings and dances between two American flags; the city joins him like moths to a flame—the resplendent flame of *will* strong enough by the end of the film to liberate Cameron, the last man par excellence, from his existential dread.

It may be tempting to view Ferris as a roguelike trickster whose subversion of the social norms reflects the hypocrisy of the conformists who secretly desire the same liberality, but Ferris is neither a non-conformist nor revolutionary—neither a Bart Simpson, a Robin Hood, nor a Guy Fawkes. Ferris is not seeking to upset the status quo nor invent a new mode of thinking. As Moffatt points out, “there is no reason to believe he does not want to turn himself into just the sort of well adjusted,

successful yuppie that his parents are,”⁹³ but neither interpretation is yet entirely encapsulatory—Ferris is neither a rogue nor a temporary escapist. The drama of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* revolves around the contrasting relationship between Ferris and his friend Cameron. In the opening scenes, Ferris is pretending to be sick, and Cameron appears to have a real sickness—if not psychological, it is a sickness of the spirit; he is plagued with lethargy, fatigue, and anxiety (the fear of [...]). When Cameron tells Ferris over the phone that “I’m dying,” we take it as a dispiritedness—a dying of the soul. He goes on in a chorus to frame the stakes spiritually: lying on his bed, rapt in the tedium of a middle-class ennui, Cameron sings, “When Cameron was in Egypt’s land, let my Cameron go!” Indeed, Cameron must be delivered from bondage.

The rest of the movie sees Cameron’s gradual rehabilitation or enlightenment as he experiences vivification within the orb of Ferris’s exuberant Being. Ferris doesn’t change throughout the film—he is invincible and absolute, and by our generic recognition by the film’s campiness à la Bugs Bunny, we know that he will elude the villains and get the carrot by and by. Ferris’s quest to evade school is a flattening analysis on both fronts: we know that he will succeed, and hence there is no drama there, but also the object of his desire is not “to evade school,” rather, Ferris is a messianic

⁹³ “Do We Really Need ‘Postmodernism’ to Understand Ferris Bueller’s Day off? A Comment on Traube.”

figure whose medicinal light will show Cameron the possibilities of heroism—courage and faith. In fact, Ferris’s crescendo of singing “Danke Schoen” and “Twist and Shout” in the parade is personally dedicated “to a young man who doesn’t think he’s seen anything good today. Cameron Frye, this one’s for you.” As Almond says, “Ferris has staged this adolescent fantasy of omnipotence expressly for his best friend.”⁹⁴ There is trouble circumscribing Ferris’s motives within the neat confines of genre characters or critical-psychological types as a hero, because as a hero Ferris has a logic of his own which resists being defined by anyone but himself. The explanation for Ferris’s day off belongs to him alone, and the most we can do is come to the table.

Cameron Frye is a nihilist—Nietzsche’s “last man”—as he himself plainly says when asked by Sloane, Ferris’s girlfriend, “what do you want?” to which he replies, “I want nothing.” Cameron, like the devil in *Paradise Lost* has his “eyes fixed downward”—the object of his desire is Nothingness itself; he is Stockholm Syndromically entranced by the void (“Beware”). In a scene where the trio—Ferris, Cameron, and Sloane—visits the Art Institute of Chicago, Cameron becomes enraptured by Georges Seurat’s painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* in which he identifies with the absurdity of the atomistic

⁹⁴ “Steve Almond’s *Freakshow*: John Hughes Goes Deep: The Unexpected Heaviness of Ferris Bueller’s Day Off.”

deconstruction of reality via pointillism. Moffatt summarizes the scene well:

[The camera cuts to] Cameron, alone, staring at the Seurat...the camera begins zooming in on the little girl in white at the center of the canvas. We cut back to Cameron, closer now. Then back to the little girl. We see his growing anguish as he realizes that her mouth is wide open, that, in fact, she is wailing...[it cuts to] an extreme close-up of Cameron's eyes, then cuts back to the canvas, to the girl's face, then to her mouth, then to the specks of paint that make up her mouth, until we can no longer resolve those specks into an image; they are just splotches of color on coarse fabric....[Cameron's] anxieties have obliterated his sense of identity.

This revelatory moment perfectly represents postmodernism and its victims. Instead of possessing and perceiving the unity and wholeness of a well-ordered world and soul, the deconstructor sees (and *is*) a conglomeration of meaningless and hostile brute substances.

Let us shift to perhaps the most famous American novel, as Ernest Hemingway asserts, "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*"⁹⁵; the story is narrated by the main character, delinquent Huckleberry Finn, the son of

an alcoholic, dead-beat tramp. We divide the novel into three acts: in the beginning, Huck is living in a small Mississippi town where he is best friends with the romantic Tom Sawyer. Resisting what he considers to be the coercive desire of the town to civilize him, Huck ends up being abducted and imprisoned by his father in his small wilderness hut before plotting a successful escape from this prison and from civilization writ large. Huck sets out by himself and ends up on Jackson's Island where he meets a runaway slave, "Nigger Jim." This is the first act. The second act is a series of misadventures on the Mississippi River where Huck encounters scathingly portrayed caricatures of various southern lifestyles. In the final act, Huck and Tom stage a mock liberation of the newly re-enslaved runaway in an elaborate romantic plot by Tom. The novel famously ends with Huck's iconic statement, "I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it."

Many modern critics often analyze the content of *Huck Finn* as an anti-slave, anti-racist narrative, but the true moral core of the novel (if it can be called moral) is Huck's resistance to civility and his rejection and condemning interpretation of Southern life. Huck does not see himself as belonging either to the world, the civilized society from which he originates, or the terrifying wilderness of his father, but instead to the abstractly absurd void which his ultimate western flight represents;

⁹⁵ *Green Hills of Africa*

this nihilistic conclusion is the result of the narrator's mode of non-being which is the humorism of jesting and mocking. Huck's approbation of all that *is not* eludes the narrator's cognizance and criticism. Huck is a rebel, which at its core is antagonistic. There is no aspect of civil society which Huck finds congenial. Even his quaint and moderate hometown, as milquetoast as it is, he writes off. The second act with its portrayal of various aspects and degrees of civilization from the genteel Graingerfords, the backwoods hokies, and the simple farmers are all subject to the condemning antagonism of Huck's villainy. At his core Huck *is not*. One might hope that Huck finds what he is looking for in the western territories, but all the evidence points to him, as antagonist, falling into the naturalistic dread of existential Nothingness. *Huckleberry Finn* could be a modernist manifesto of incivility. Twain's chief representational modality is to mock, to jest, to lampoon, and to condemn all that *is*.

Huck is held in contrast to the idealistic but romantic, book-learned Tom Sawyer, portrayed as antic and ignorant. Here Twain shows his cards as a modernist a la Emerson. Huck's censorship of idealism and tradition vis-à-vis his disassociation with Tom is the rub. Anti-Platonism meets a crossroads at the intersection of reality: existence or non-being. In the anti-Platonic world where the apparent is the real, the path of heroism—a positive, creative essence—would be Nietzsche's

Übermensch whereby truth is a matter of the superior will, but Huck turns towards antagonism, deconstruction, and non-being—modernity. At the prospect of asserting oneself over the world, Huck cowers. By his rejection of the world, the world rejects him and spits him out into the futile absurdity of finding Being amidst the void, only in a different locale.

Here are two quintessential American characters—Ferris, the impetuous independent par excellence whom the gods favor a la Machiavelli: “like a woman, Fortune is always the friend of young men, for they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity,”⁹⁶ and Huck, a bastard, the perpetual rebel whose punk bangs one imagines drape over his contemptuous eyes, is easy enough to classify by Aristotle's schema that, “he who is unable to live in a society must be either a beast or a god.” Huck's world is farcical because he supposes himself to have the emotional and intellectual superiority to see through the restrictive dictates of civilization and the pettiness of its adherents a la Seinfeld: “what's the deal with society?” whereafter there is the drum roll rimshot of Freud's joke qua hostility. Ferris' world is a celebration because his is not a flight-away-from, i.e. the pursuit of Nothing, but a meditation on values. The dark world of pubescent nihilism as depicted in the classrooms of droning lecturers and drooling teens is the cave of Plato's allegory, as Ferris says in the shower while preparing for his day off:

⁹⁶ *The Prince*

I don't care if you're fifty-five or seven, everybody needs a day off now and then. It's a beautiful day. How can I be expected to handle high school? I do actually have a test. That wasn't bullshit. That I care about it was. It's on European socialism. I mean, really. What's the point? I'm not European. I don't plan to be European. So, who gives a shit if they're socialists?

A parallel can easily be drawn in the allegory:

Now . . . suppose there were honors and awards among the captives, which they granted as prizes to one another for being the best at recognizing the various shadows passing by or deciphering their patterns, their order, and the relationships among them, and therefore best at predicting what shadow would be seen next. Do you believe that our liberated man would be much concerned with such honors, or that he would be jealous of those who received them? Or that he would strive to be like those who were lauded by the captives and enjoyed pride of place among them?

No. Ferris, "our liberated man" would take no honor nor pride in being ranked among his classmates' study of appearances; he climbed out of the cave and "into the light of the sun" to enjoy a "beautiful day," and what's more, he was willing, as Plato's ascendent philosopher kings must be compelled to do, to return to the cave to extract Cameron from the shadows.

Insofar as a novel is the articulation of a certain consciousness or perspective, Huck interprets every character as an ugly jester—a caricature—with the goal of reducing their types to absurdity. To extend the previous metaphor, Huck is the class clown of the cave throwing rocks at the images projected onto the wall with all ridicule and resentment: Nigger Jim, a superstitious runaway slave, is ascribed the intelligence of a brute beast, and at one point is dressed up as a "Sick Arab...[with] a long curtain-calico gown, and a white horse-hair wig and whiskers, and hands and ears and neck [painted] all over a dead, dull, solid blue"; the King and Duke are buffoonish, carpetbagging Yankees who half-believe themselves to be royalty and end up being tarred, feathered and railroaded; Huck's deadbeat father, Pap, is a violent savage who drowns in the Mississippi; Tom Sawyer's comeuppance for romance—his chivalric way of making sense of the world—is a bullet in his leg. Huck is too wise in himself to be captured by the opiate of these plebians—he *is not* like them, thus, proving Plato right in his estimation of the attitude of those whom the philosopher king would rescue from the bondage of the cave: "And if [the men of the cave] had the opportunity, do you suppose that they might raise their hands against [the philosopher who has descended to rescue them] and kill this person who is trying to liberate them to a higher plane?" Yes; Huck gnashes his teeth at such conformists in true Emersonian fashion.

The end of Huck's conversation is not the confidence and conviction of Ferris's heroic, unary Being, but a

double-mindedness and self-loathing produced by his contempt for the world; his antagonism toward the world reflects onto himself as he debases his Being to become an object of definition by the void (“*I am not...*”) and the result is the autocannibalism of a conglomerated soul, or as Plato would say, his soul is in a state of civil war against itself a la Sartre’s existential nausea by violently dividing “I” from “am.”

⁹⁷ *Hamlet*, 3.1.64-68

Hamlet and Hercules

The only poetry that should be allowed in our state is hymns to the gods and paeans in praise of good men.

Plato, *The Republic*

In answering Hamlet’s question, “To be, or not to be... Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of trouble, And by opposing end them,”⁹⁷ the modern nihilistic American has wholeheartedly chosen the latter, and in doing so, has not only opposed the nihilist’s endless “sea of troubles,” but Being itself—raging against everything and everyone who *is* or *will*. Indeed, Hamlet’s famous soliloquy is a preponderance of suicide—the ultimate refusal of Being. Non-existence is the unnatural temptress luring the would-be hero away from his will to justice and into the realm of pessimistic resignation. Hamlet’s disdain of Being—what *is*—leads him to seek consolation from the torment of his fear of existence in his father’s ghost—the dead; acquiescing to the realm of the dead as such—the absurd, or more accurately, *being not* in the realm of the living—Hamlet consigns himself to the mind of the absurd—the *not*: “I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put on an antic disposition.”⁹⁸ As Heidegger says, anxiety is the fear of

⁹⁸ 1.5.191-192

[...] ⁹⁹—enoredness with what *is not*—nihilism—Stockholm Syndromic to the void—“A fiery mind, / A savageness in unreclaimed blood” ¹⁰⁰—envy for *willing not what has been*.

“Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!” ¹⁰¹

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is the five act story of the Prince of Denmark—Hamlet—whose late father-king, appearing to him as a ghost to inform him that he was murdered and usurped by the new king—Hamlet’s uncle—is disgusted at him for having quickly remarried his widow, Hamlet’s mother, and demands that the Prince avenge him. What follows is a rumination on madness (and a mad rumination) where, unsurprisingly, everybody dies, because Shakespeare’s is a world of non-being, and if any credit is to be given to him, it is in that he, unlike Twain, at least acknowledges it. Hamlet is a pessimistic nihilist par excellence—the non-existent antagonist of reality who has seduced the anarcho-modernist professoriate for centuries. In Hamlet, and

⁹⁹ “The “nothing” with which anxiety brings us face to face, unveils the nullity by which Dasein, in its very basis, is defined; and this basis itself is as thrownness into death.” *Being and Nothingness*

¹⁰⁰ 2.1.37-38

¹⁰¹ 1.2.133-137

¹⁰² “The increasingly mad howling, the increasingly undisguised grinding of teeth of the anarchist dogs who now roam the streets of European culture, indicates that the tempo of this movement is still

indeed Shakespeare writ large, these intellectualists—“mad howling anarchist dogs... with their undisguised grinding of teeth...who roam the streets of European culture” ¹⁰²—among whom Shakespeare is chief—have found their model of an anti-man who *has had enough!* Who *is just sick of it!* Who is willing to devolve his mind into a state of chaos in order to upset the order at the behest of a mere apparition, despite whatever innocent collateral damage—much in *Hamlet*—may be incurred along the way in the quest toward total deconstruction. Through the spellbinding fancy of dramatic poetry, Shakespeare achieves making the mass of playgoers applaud the Prince’s double-murder-suicide to satisfy the demands of a bloodthirsty ghost leaving a trail of death behind him that includes his mother and girlfriend—the latter he infects with the same existentialist disease after killing her father, causing her to drown herself, or should we say, choose “not to be.” At the end of the play chaos seizes the state and death infects its citizens.

Let us for a moment give Shakespeare the benefit of the doubt and suppose that *Hamlet*, and the rest of its ilk, are moralistic, negative example of how *not to* behave, and ignore what is more probable, that Shakespeare, wishing himself to be a king, celebrates

much too slow and sleepy for those more impatient, for the sick and those addicted to the instinct referred to above: these anarchists, apparently in contrast to the peacefully industrious democrats and ideologues of revolution, still more to the foolish philosophers and enthusiasts of fraternity who call themselves socialists and want a ‘free society’, are actually at one with them all in their fundamental and instinctive animosity towards every other type of society than that of the autonomous herd.” *Genealogy of Morals*

the Machiavellianism of his characters which he was too unskilled to implement in his own life. By Plato, it is obvious why showing how *not to be* is futile, and only duplicates non-being—a race to Nothingness. However, in what are likely the most famous lines of English literature Shakespeare lays out his criterion for Being and existentialism, and the rest of the play is a demonstration of the effects of the latter. Thus, we may ignore the more insidious truth about Shakespeare's envious antagonism and analyze Hamlet's Nothingness as he chooses "not to be" while preserving some degree of the play's artistic integrity, despite its author's fanatic inclination towards resolute deconstruction.

"To be, or not to be..."

The infamous thirty-three-line speech delivered in Act III, Scene I just before Hamlet emotionally brutalizes the infatuated Ophelia is about jihadism—rife with the language of death and suicide, the corruption of public-political apparatuses, and "high thoughts" of violent revolution, copied in full below:¹⁰³

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them. To die—to sleep,
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the
rub:
For in that sleep of death what dreams may
come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause—there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of
time,
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's
contumely,
The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.

¹⁰³ 3.1.64-96

"On [Hamlet's] choice depends / The sanctity and health of this whole state."¹⁰⁴ The subjective state indeed awaits the assertion of the Prince, yet unfulfilled by his descent into nihilism. Again, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark"¹⁰⁵, but it is no mystery what—the virus of modernity. Hamlet is not the only offender, likewise also Laertes swears "To hell, allegiance! ... / I dare damnation. To this point I stand, / That both the worlds I give to negligence, / Let come what comes, only I'll be avenged"¹⁰⁶, but the giving of the world over to negligence—deconstruction—is predicated upon the abdication of his own positive Being; here, the chicken comes before the egg. What else is significant in the characterization of Hamlet's absurdity, and the first of his references to Hercules, is in his comparing himself to the Nemean lion—an object vanquished by the hero.¹⁰⁷ Hamlet's attention, perspective, and focus is turned to hell and torment—he is set against injustice, or rather, his *will* to justice has become a *will not* to injustice; the *will* to paradise is a *will not* to hell. Hamlet is Stockholm Syndromic to death and injustice—enraptured by anti-being. "Vengeance" is the lust to antagonize injustice, but it is nevertheless to antagonize, to *be not* and *will not*. Hamlet is antithetic to injustice, consumed with *not being* and he *will not* what *has been*, as he says, "All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, / That youth and observation copied there, / And [my father's Ghost's vengeful] commandment all alone shall live / Within the

book and volume of my brain."¹⁰⁸ From Hamlet's mouth, in what does his Being consist? In that which *shall not be*. Hamlet mode is deconstruction—his is the mind of the villain. His end is madness—absurdity—the void, and Denmark follows after him, his city, his world, the subjective reflection of his anti-being—corruption and death. The world, reflecting Hamlet's nihilism, is "a prison... in which there are many confines, / wards, and dungeons; Denmark being one o' / th'worst.... for there is / nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it / so. To me it is a prison."¹⁰⁹ Following Hamlet's death, the Danish kingship is turned over to a foreigner; the Prince has failed to order his world and his nation, and the void claimed what had been allotted to it—absurdity for absurdity. Hamlet says, "There's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark / But he's an arrant knave"¹¹⁰, and Horatio, without knowing about whom Hamlet is speaking, agrees, "There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grace, / To tell us this"; neither do we need a ghost from the grave to tell us that "There's ne'er a villain dwelling in our universities / But he's an arrant knave." Succumbing to the anti-will of revenging his father's death, Hamlet's "transformation—so call it, / Sith nor th'exterior nor the inward man / Resembles what it was,"¹¹¹ is a total annihilation of self-existence—an adoption of the essence of the void: [...]. "That it / were better my mother had not borne me"¹¹²—the culmination of the mind set on non-existence. "Lunacy"—the "model

¹⁰⁴ 1.3.23-24

¹⁰⁵ 1.4.100

¹⁰⁶ 4.5.149-153

¹⁰⁷ 1.4.80

¹⁰⁸ 1.5.107-110

¹⁰⁹ 2.2.262-270

¹¹⁰ 1.5.137-138

¹¹¹ 2.2.5-7

¹¹² 3.1.133-134

of the modern consciousness"¹¹³—the pessimistic nihilist, drowned under a guilty conscience for having *been*, who rages and condemns God and the world and would have them deconstructed rather than find the courage to assert his word—they who lack a justification for themselves and their Being in the world. Hamlet says that as far different as his murdered father is to his murderer uncle, so far is himself from Hercules¹¹⁴—the greatest of heroes. The modern American “artist” with his antagonistically nihilistic consciousness, is Hamlet—despondent, will-less, and cowardly; they *are not*.

The Paeon of Hercules

Adapted from Apollodorus's *The Library*, Book 2 c. 1-2 CE

These are among the feats and the birth and the death of the renowned hero whom the Oracle named Hercules—son of the son of Kronos—Zues by the mortal Alcmena, wife of Amphitryon, prince of Thebes, when the god bedded the woman by impersonating her husband then conceiving her a son whom she called Alcides after his grandfather Alcaeus, father of Amphitryon. Hera, the wife of Zues, being enflamed with jealousy sent two serpents to destroy the infant in his crib, both of which Hercules strangled with

his hands, and Amphitryon knew the child was not his, but Zues'.

Hercules grew to four cubits tall, full of beauty with a gleam of fire in his eyes, wherefore Amphitryon would not abide him in his home and so ordered him to tend to some certain cattle in the hopes that he might be slain by the lion of Cithaeron which ravaged them. When the lion approached to cull the herd, Hercules slew the beast and donned its pelt on his own head, and the lord of that land hearing of the deed and having rights to all game therein sentenced the champion to exile. Hera, seizing the moment, induced Hercules to a mad rage causing Zues's son to murder the children of Thebes. Awakening from Hera's stupor, dismayed Hercules fled into the wilderness.

Apollo, being himself also a son of Zues and wishing to help Hercules, appeared to him in the wilderness and instructed that the Oracle at Delphi might redeem him, and he obeyed. The priestess of Apollo at Delphi received Hercules and prophesied that he should perform ten labors for King Eurystheus of Tiryns, upon completion of which he would achieve immortality, and dubbed him thereafter Hercules. Believing

¹¹³ *The New Cambridge Shakespeare*

¹¹⁴ 1.2.167

the prophecy, Hercules travelled to Tiryns and submitted himself to the king.

The first labor prescribed by Eurystheus was to retrieve the pelt of the Nemean lion, begotten by Typhon with an invulnerable hide. In Nemea Hercules tracked the lion and putting his arm round its neck held it tight till he choked it then skinned it with its own claws. At the mere thought of Hercules and his trophy, having heard of his victory and returning nearby, Eurystheus cowered in a clay pot and made his servant discourse with him instead.

The second labor Hercules wrought for redemption was to slay the nine headed hydra of Lerna—eight mortal and the middle immortal. In combat with the hydra, it wound itself around his legs and every time he smashed a head with his club, two more grew in its place, wherefore Hercules' chariot driver Iolaus began branding the severed necks whenever they were exposed. Having dealt with the eight regenerating heads of the hydra, Hercules chopped off the immortal head and buried it beneath a rock. Eurystheus however would not accept this labor as one of the ten because Hercules had been given help from Iolaus.

The third labor Hercules performed was hunting the Cerynitian deer. It belonged to Artemis, sister of Apollo, who freely gave it to the hero.

The fourth labor was retrieving the Erymanthian boar. By now Eurystheus was terrified of Hercules and wished either to see him perish or else forever remain his servant, therefore he demanded that the great boar be brought back to Tiryns alive. While tracking the beast across the land of Pholus, Hercules pursued the boar into a snowfield where it grew exhausted and fainted.

The fifth labor he laid on him was to cleanse the stables of the cattle of Augeas in a single day. Hercules accosted Augeas and told him he would do the service in exchange for a tithe of the cattle; this being agreed upon, Hercules diverted two rivers into the stables and accomplished the feat and then dammed them both. Eurystheus would not accept this labor either because it had been performed for hire.

The sixth labor of Hercules was to chase away the Stymphalian birds which shot their feathers like arrows and nested in the thickets of the forest of Arcadia. On a bluff overlooking the forest, the goddess Athena, who sprang in full armor from the head of Zues, gave the hero brazen

castanets which being rapped caused the birds to flee from their nests being made targets for Hercules's arrows.

The seventh labor Eurystheus enjoined on the demigod was to bring him the Cretan bull which Poseidon had made savage. Hercules caught it and brought it to Eurystheus and having shown it to him he let it afterwards go free.

The eighth labor was to capture the man-eating mares of Diomedes. Upon delivering them to Eurystheus, the king dedicated them to Hera.

The ninth labor to which Hercules was subjected was to attain the belt of Ares which belonged to Hippolyte, Queen of the Amazons, as a gift for Eurystheus's daughter. Upon arriving at the inlet of the river Thermodon where the Amazons dwelt, Hippolyte alone met Hercules having heard of his fame and eagerly promised him Ares' belt, but Hera disguised herself as an Amazonian and stirred up a conspiracy among the rest of the women making them believe that Hercules was intent on stealing their queen. Suspecting treachery, Hercules slew Hippolyte for the belt and escaped to Tiryns.

The tenth labor Hercules undertook was capturing the cowherd of Geryon who had the body of three men grown together and joined in one at the waist—the son of Chrysaor by Callirrhoe, daughter of Ocean, and defended by Orthus the two-headed dog. Slaying them both, Hercules herded the cattle towards Tiryns, but Hera sent gadflies to enrage them, so he wrestled each one at a time to Eurystheus.

The ten labors being performed as the Oracle prophesied, and Eurystheus not acknowledging either the hydra, because Hercules had received help, or the cleansing of the stables of Augaes for having received payment, an eleventh labor was demanded by the King of Tiryns: to retrieve the golden apples of the Hesperides, guarded by an immortal dragon with a hundred heads. Journeying to the land of the Hesperides, Hercules shot the eagle of the Caucasus with an arrow he had dipped in the poisonous gall of the hydra of Lerna—the same eagle which was continually devouring the liver of the chained Prometheus. As thanks, Prometheus gave Hercules the crown of olive which became the badge of victory of the Olympic games, the first of which Hercules then commenced and afterward instituted as the quadrennial festival. Prometheus then advised that Hercules

not secure the apples himself, but that he send Atlas instead in exchange for temporarily relieving him of the weight of the globe which he perpetually carried on his shoulders. After exchanging places with Atlas and having him retrieve the golden apples of the Hesperides, Atlas suggested that he would also deliver them to Eurystheus, and Hercules agreed but requested that he would only give him a pad for his head for comfort under the globe while he was away. Atlas set the apples on the ground and supported the globe once again, but the hero fled with the apples back to Tiryns.

The twelfth labor imposed on Hercules—and the mightiest of all—was to bring the three-headed dog with the tail of a dragon and on his back the heads of snakes—Cerberus—up from Tartarus of Hades. Arriving in Laconia where was the cave which opened down to Hades, Hercules descended. When Pluto, the keeper of Cerberus, knew of Hercules's quest for the three-headed dog, he permitted the hero to take the beast provided that he could master it without weapons. Covered by the lion's skin, Hercules flung his arms round the head of the brute and ascended with it to Eurystheus before bringing it back to Hades.

Returning from the cave of Hades to Tiryns, the ferryman of the river Evenus—Nessus the centaur—was threatening to violate a young woman—Deianira—whom he was carrying across. Hercules drew an arrow which he had dipped in the poisonous gall of the hydra and sent it through the centaur's heart. While Nessus lay dying on the opposite bank, he told Deianira that if she would have a love charm to operate on Hercules then she should soak her scarf in his blood that flowed from the wound inflicted by the arrow. At the hero's approach, the woman offered him her red dyed scarf as a token and taking it in his hands a fatal corrosion spread over his entire body, for the centaur's blood was poisoned by the gall. In agony foreseeing his eminent death, Hercules built a pyre on which he laid himself and commanded his chariot driver Iolaus to set it ablaze. While the pyre was burning, a cloud passed under Hercules and with a peal of thunder wafted him up to Olympus. Thereafter he obtained immortality, and being reconciled to Hera he married her daughter Hebe, by whom he had sons, Alexiares and Anicetus.

Where are the Hercules who *are* and who *will*? Christ revealed that the man—the will-full man—the Herculean man—may command with his word—his *will*—that a tree “be removed and cast into the sea”, but the *are-not*

Hamlets implore that the sea once again flood the earth—that the world inherit the void’s nihilistic absurdity of Nothingness. Hercules—the blessed of the gods—the epic hero—unlike Hamlet, positively turns on the hellish moment of tragedy. Hercules courageously asserts his Being and *will* upon the envious world of non-existence which gnashes upon him with its nihilistic teeth. Euripides (c. 480 – c. 406 BC) pessimistically reimagines a tragic, proto-modernist bastardization of Heracles c. 416 BC—a “grotesque abortion” as Swinburne says¹¹⁵; his is not the epic myth of the greatest Greek hero. In Euripides’s version the events of the traditional myth are reversed: the play opens with Heracles returning from the underworld having completed his labors and is afterward stricken with madness, causing him to kill his family. The play ends pathetically with a humanistic Heracles enduring the tragedy by emigrating with his friend. Hercules’ heroism is thus reduced to the pessimistic nihilism of resigned non-being: “Let me hurl myself down from some sheer rock.... A man to be pitied... Let me show you my life: a life not worth living now.” Hercules becomes the object of void by Euripides—the victim of tragic chaos. Plato’s Socrates in *The Republic* forbids such “pitiful laments by famous men” in the just city because

that one good man does not think death holds any terror for another who is a friend of his... [he] would hardly mourn for him as if he had suffered something terrible... And what is more, we reckon that such a man is in himself most self-sufficient

in what is needed for a good life and of all men least dependent on others.... So the loss of son or brother, or of property, or anything else of the kind, will hold the least terrors for the good man... so when any catastrophe of the kind overtakes him, he will lament it less and bear it more calmly than others... so we should be quite right to cut out from our poetry lamentations by famous men. We can give them to the less reputable women characters or to the bad men, so that those whom we say we are bringing up as Guardians of our state will be ashamed to imitate them.

The traditional heroic Hercules begins at this disaster wrought by Hera, where Euripides’s Heracles ends—facing down the nihilistic temptation to Nothingness through the *will* to *be*. Hercules, a demi-god by Zues, becomes the object of Hera’s jealousy and is smitten by the goddess with madness which causes him to kill the innocent. After this, the story is not a revenge tragedy a la Hamlet, nor one of self-pity a la Euripides, but of a demi-god who asserts himself onto the non-existent world of chaos. Whereas Hamlet reacts to the revelation of injustice through a nihilistic lust for revenge—*will not, am not*—Hercules’s Being imposes on the world the quality of his positive existence—the oracle tells him that through submission to the king’s labors he will earn himself redemption, glory, and the ascendant claim to his inheritance—godhood.

The defining characteristic of Hercules’ greatness is his ability to emerge from the underworld—the world

¹¹⁵ Quoted by Verrall in *Four Plays of Euripides*

whose very nature is Nothingness. Hell cannot quench the subjective, protagonistic assertion of the greatest hero's existential essence. Hercules—the man—the Being—cannot dwell in the world of non-existence, or rather the hero's *will* creates a reflexive object (the world) that *is*, i.e. the world has form. Here is the distinction between the epic protagonist—Hercules—and the tragic antagonist—Hamlet; this epic heroism is more than mere virtuous endurance; it is a metaphysical law of the existential subject's supremacy as such over the reflexive objectivity of the world. Hamlet's cowardice—his flight into absurdity—and the nihilistic anxiety of his “antic disposition” is in embarrassingly stark contrast to the manliness of the hero—Hercules.

Achilles and Satan

[What] power of attraction which everything contradictory and antithetical has.

Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals

Homer's Achilles is the hero par excellence, at least in *The Iliad*; he is written into the realm of tragic regret—torment and resentment—in *The Odyssey* where the radiant, godlike, manly star of heroism ultimately denounces his legacy of assertive Being as a phantom in the underworld, claiming that it is better to be a slave on earth than dead in hell—absurdity. In *The Iliad*, Achilles has power with gods and kings. The fate of a ten-year war is his to define. Like Hercules, Achilles cannot long be subjected to the dictates of a villainous king—Agamemnon, an antagonistic non-being—who is weaker than himself. Argive King Agamemnon violates the warrior etiquette which Achilles *will*s—that is, the law of heroism which Achilles asserts—with impudence toward the hero's war spoil—a woman; Achilles withdraws his allegiance to the Greek army, and they suffer slaughter by the Trojans, yet this is an inaccurate frame. Achilles, the hero, creates a world of the man-of-war, the consuming fire, the everlasting burning—“rage”—which carries its own *reason*, as all worlds do. Achilles never *will not* (except when he flails in *The Odyssey*'s Hades'), i.e. it is not the case that Achilles *will not* support Agamemnon; Achilles *will* uphold the world—

the *reason*—of “rage” because Achilles has a positive essence as the heroic subject (contrasted against the annihilated (nonessential) Nothingness of Sartre’s nihilistic, existential subject (who is really an object)). Achilles does not withdraw from Agamemnon, but Achilles *wills* that his world *be* orderly; Agamemnon ceases *to be* orderly after the reason of Achilles and therefore *is not*. Achilles’ world—the heroic world—is the axis of Being in which villainous Agamemnon has no place. Achilles is not Agamemnon’s object of censure—ha!—Agamemnon is a criminal by the heroic logic. Agamemnon infolds away from the *reason-of-rage* and reaps the chaos of *non-being*—*non-being* in Achilles’ world—the world—the hero’s creative realm that bears his essence. Coincidentally, Agamemnon having forsaken Achilles’ *reason-of-rage*, Zeus allies with the Trojans against him, and Hera with the Greeks; Agamemnon is now under the aegis of Hera—the same goddess that was the jealous villain of Hercules. Absurdity.

We continue to seek out Achilles but turn to *The Odyssey*¹¹⁶ whose protagonist is a hero of a different *reason*. “Enduring” and “resourceful” Odysseus—“the peer of Zeus in strategems”¹¹⁷—who is a minor character warring with the Achaeans against Troy in *The Iliad*, does not order his world by rage, but through strategy and

¹¹⁶ “The quest begun by Odysseus and continued over three millennia has come to an end with the observation that there is nothing to seek. This alleged fact was announced by Nietzsche just

“cleverness”; he has the subtlety even to successfully entreat Achilles during the Trojan War. *The Odyssey* takes place ten years after the war, and veteran Odysseus is ready to reassume kingship over his home state, Ithaca. In Odysseus’s narrative to the Phaeacians in Book XI of his adventures thus far, he recounts his journey to the land of the dead to consult with the prophet Teiresias, wherein he also encounters many “phantoms”, including his mother, Agamemnon, the “image” of Heracles (another “grotesque abortion”) (“but he himself among the immortal / gods”), and Achilles (even more botched than Hercules). A quick injection of Odysseus’s “interview” with Heracles: the latter says

Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful
Odysseus,
unhappy man, are you too leading some wretched
destiny
such as I too pursued when I went still in the
sunlight?

We have almost arrived at the heart of the absurdity of the Homeric cosmos, but Achilles’s corruption to villain—anti-being—is the founding forerunner of tragic nihilism—we impute Homer as Plato does. Indeed, Hamlet’s father’s ghost echoes the same pessimistic, existential sentiment as Achilles’ ghost does to

over a century ago when he announced that ‘God is dead.’” *The Closing of the American Mind*

¹¹⁷ *The Iliad*, Book 2, Lines 165 and 635

Odysseus—quoted below—from the underworld in these famous lines:

I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another
man, one with no land allotted him and not much
to live on,
than be a king over all the perished dead.

Homer's underworld does not carry the same unspeakable torment that Shakespeare's "prison house" does in *Hamlet*, "whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul,"¹¹⁸ but it is still a world of non-existence—a "place without pleasure"—of mere images—and those within it rue themselves for ever *having been* and the world for *being*. Plato's Socrates cites these lines in Book III of *The Republic* in his famous expulsion of the poets enumerating what sorts of stories ought to be allowed to be told to children as a passage which must be cut, because it presents "a gloomy account of the after-life" which would lead to a fear of death and dissuading the preference of "death in battle to defeat and slavery... it is positively wicked to say these things about Achilles or believe them when we hear them." Plato encourages "writers and poets to proceed on the opposite principle," i.e. glorifying the afterlife, e.g. Valhalla or the famous St. Crispian's Day Speech from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. Yes, this passage from *The Odyssey* ought to be cut, but for a different reason. The *Odyssey's* Achilles and Heracles, and Hamlet's father's ghost, attempt to impose their new state of non-being onto the living—the

Stockholm Syndromic temptation to become enslaved to the definitions of the void—in Hamlet's father's case of the Prince, successfully, but what has Homer done with Achilles and Heracles in *The Odyssey*? "How the mighty have fallen!" These heroes have reneged on their legendary lives of heroism and Being, unable to overcome or assert themselves upon the nihilistic realm of the underworld such as Odysseus is about to do and Hercules once did, and that with Cerberus in tow! One can also recall the climactic scene of Disney's *Hercules* where the hero willingly descends into the phantasmic lake of dead souls that tries to drain his life (this, the resistance of Being to the nihilistic, non-existent world of Hades' with its assertion of existential Nothingness on the subject) to rescue dead Megara and then successfully, immortally ascends with her—the Fates cannot cut his chord, because—surprise!—Hercules is a god, or to put it another way, Hercules *is* ("Wonderboy"). Disney's Hercules is then immediately taken to Olympus—the world of Being. *The Odyssey's* Heracles and Achilles *are not*. Although it is easier to dismiss Euripedes's more esoteric, proto-modernist, tragic *Heracles*, Homer is less easily disregarded. Whitman's lamentation to Lincoln could be appropriately applied here for Achilles's and Heracles's pitiful lost souls:

Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,

¹¹⁸ 1.5.20-21

Fallen cold and dead.

Achilles with all self-pity laments his present state of non-existence in the underworld and asserts that he would rather be a slave to a peasant than a king over the dead—"a living dog is better than a dead lion"¹¹⁹—but if we exchange the terms "life and death" with "being and non-being," we find a more useful interpretation of the proverb for us: "[being] a dog is better than [not being] a lion," i.e. anything is preferable to existentialism! We are not here dealing literally with "life and death," for "life and death" is not the distinction between the ancient Greek mythological earth and underworld, neither is it, as we shall see, in Milton's *Paradise Lost*; if it were, then our ontology would be the art of necromancy. There is no mincing words, Homer's Achilles and Heracles have succumbed to the nihilistic, modernist fate of non-existence. Heracles lodges the accusation at Odysseus that he in his homecoming is "leading some wretched destiny / such as I too pursued"—that wretched destiny?: Being and Heroism. Perhaps it may be a "wretched destiny," but only if one *is* wretched. One may look to William Wallace's assertion of "freedom" on his world while being drawn and quartered—the villain may see wretchedness, or rather as Odysseus's mother sees it in

¹¹⁹ Ecclesiastes 9:4

¹²⁰ William Wallace *wills* "freedom" while being drawn and quartered. Wallace embodies Plato's *thumos*—the self-sacrificial defense of a higher ideal against danger. Why Hemmingway says in *The Old Man and the Sea*, "a man cannot be destroyed..." He declares what shall be at the expense of pain to his own flesh. This is the hero and warfare. Deconstructors tremble at the sacrificial man who invincibly *is* and *wills*—he cannot be cannibalized.

Hades', that which *is not* pleasurable, but the Hero sees freedom, because *he is* free.¹²⁰ Homer's Achilles and Heracles have adopted the essence of the non-existent world—allowed themselves to be defined by *that which is not*. The result is nausea.

Contrast Achilles's unmanly un-assertion (submission to the void) with Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*—the anti-hero, anti-man, anti-being par excellence who iconically summarizes the existentialist mentality by turning the proverb on its head: "better to be a king in hell than a slave in heaven." One might mistakenly take Satan's statement as the definitive assertion of Being¹²¹—of manliness—which *will* even at pain of death, and it would not be surprising for Sartre, in his atheism of being to here defend the devil's attitude who embodies existentialism nearly three centuries before *Being and Nothingness*. We approach the Gordian Knot of Being and heroism between Achilles and Satan, for it may be that our invocation of William Wallace in contrast to Achilles as the champion of heroism in Hell—the epic hero who *is* and who *will*—would be condemned by Achilles and Heracles but upheld by Satan. Is it the case that, like Wallace, Satan has both chosen "to be" and fought the fight of "outrageous fortune" over the

¹²¹ "Much of the action in hell under the directorship of Satan merely parodies what occurs in God's unfallen creation. For example, Satan volunteers to go to Eden to tempt the newly created humans echoes the volunteering of the Son to go and redeem humankind. Likewise, the parliament-style debate that occurs among Satan's demons in many ways parodies the heavenly assemblies recorded in Job 1." Stallard, from the Introduction to *Paradise Lost*

antagonistic world of unjust law and authority and has in a sense placed himself in torment? Already this characterization is troubling, and our closest readers will recognize the problems here. Let us not moralize between these characters, for we have already separated “good and evil” from “hero and villain.” Would we literally advocate for the devil? We have too much simplified Satan in *Paradise Lost* to equivocate between him and William Wallace. Let us examine the poem more closely.

Paradise Lost is the epic story of Satan told mostly from his point of view, and his rebellion against God, his defeat in heavenly war, his expulsion from Heaven into Hell along with his devilish legion, and his ensuing “bold enterprise which he undertook against God and man” as the Lord of “Pandemonium”—the successful temptation of Adam and Eve—whereafter the angels, Sin and Death, enter with Satan into “the place of man.” The poem’s last few chapters focus on Adam and Eve and a prophecy of God’s plan for the Son—a hope for redemption.

Common sense alone is sufficient to understand the character of Satan as antagonist—indeed as *the* Antagonist (the Hebraic noun “satan” means “adversary.”), as Satan says of himself in Book X: “for I glory in the name, / Antagonist of Heaven’s Almighty King”. Satan is not the heroic subject *who will*, but the antagonizing object that *will not* akin to the non-existent entities (such as the doorknob) that victimizingly define Sartre’s Antoine from *Nausea* with their Nothingness of

the void. So how do we reconcile the antagonistic non-essence of Satan against his apparent *will-to-be* lord of hell? Understand that “hell,” as in the case of Achilles, is not the moralistic destination of evil creatures, but it is a condition of non-existence, i.e. the void, as Satan declares, “Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell.” The narrator of *Paradise Lost* upholds Heidegger’s interpretive “Dasein” when he famously says, “the mind can make a Heaven of Hell, or a Hell of Heaven,” but this is demonstrably not the case for Satan. Consider the characteristic of another rebellious angel in *Paradise Lost*, Mammon, who “even in heaven, his looks and thoughts were always downward bent.” Here is the negative assertion of anti-being incompatible with the existential world of Heaven. Themselves *Being* Hell, that is, *not-being* Heaven, are the objects of definition by the void—hellish: “and that must be our cure, to be no more.” Hell is not a world which must be created to accommodate the nature of the devils; it is the a priori, non-existent world which has captured them, all defined by Nothingness. The “cure” to antagonizing is “to be no more.” Another fallen angel, Moloch, would “rather than be less cared, not to be at all.”

Here is the post-existentialist, summary analysis of the precipitating events in Heaven which led to Satan and his followers’ expulsion and subsequent lordship of Hell, according to *Paradise Lost*: the devil’s constant “downward bent”, that is, the Stockholm Syndromic enrapturement with the non-existent world (even in Heaven) caused him to become an object of definition by

the void—to inherit the essence of non-being—Nothingness—which necessitated his antagonism to *that-which-is*, namely, God. With this framework, how do we interpret Satan's iconic statement, "better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven?" Let us invoke Nietzsche's tentpole phrase, "men will rather will *nothing* than not will at all." Satan fundamentally adopts the essence of the void—*is-not* and *will-not*—but is it the case that "servitude in Heaven" is "not willing at all?" Not so, as God has bequeathed *free will* to all creatures, as the angel Tobias says while instructing the angel Raphael to warn Adam of Satan:

...advise him of his happy state,
Happiness in his power left free to will,
Left to his own free will, his will though free,
Yet mutable; whence warn him to beware

Martineau extends this trait to Satan: "Satan's indomitable willpower seems to represent the very force of free will, a will which God granted him,"¹²² but this is not really the question. We encounter a categorical error by attempting to extend Nietzsche's formulation of "will" to the problem of "existence," the former being a fruit of the latter. Furthermore, while Nietzsche's theory holds for "last-men"—the modern pessimistic nihilists—it is a non-issue for the hero (and Nietzsche's "Übermensch") by definition, because the hero *is* and *will be*. Generally, as exemplified by Hercules's ascent from the

Underworld, men may repent themselves of their existentialism, as C.S. Lewis states, "the doors of Hell are locked on the inside."¹²³ Achilles, in his fallen Odyssean state, and Satan are both unheroic.

Having done this housekeeping, we can reformulate Satan's and Achilles' statements in a post-existentialist framework, also substituting "Hell" for "the Void"—the world of non-existence—and "Heaven" for "world"—the existent subject's collection of entities which represent his at-hand knowledge (recall the wanderer's body):

Achilles: It is better *not to be* in the world than *to be* in the Void.

Satan: It is better *to be* in the Void than *not to be* in the world.

Our interpretation may be surprising, but the absurdity here lies in the stories' narratives; Satan's statement is more realistic, that is, it accurately reflects the nihilistic modernist's mentality (will to Nothingness), whereas Achilles' demonstrates the pessimistic conclusion of existentialism's errant logic and represents the inapplicability of Nietzsche's theoretical formula to the higher order function of "being" over "willing," unless one undertakes some semantic gymnastics to equate {*not to be* in a world = *to be* nothing, and *to be* in the Void = *not to be*} to arrive at "men would rather [be] nothing than not [be]." This may not be far-fetched. We digress. Satan's

¹²² "'Sufficient to Have Stood, Though Free to Fall': Free Will in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*"

¹²³ *The Problem of Pain*

position captures the phenomenal, nihilistic antagonist (clearly seen in comparing Frida Kahlo's modernist *The Face of Isolation* to da Vinci's classical *Mona Lisa*). Achilles' is the logic behind existentialism—quintessentially Sartrean—which carries the assumption that it is possible to exist while being non-essential (recall Sartre's "I / Am" dissection). This is the problem worth bearing investigation.

What is the Achillean argument? That a man can exist as a non-entity in a world of Being (be a thrall on earth), i.e. that there is a possibility for existence apart from heroism. Here is the heart of the absurdity of modernity's logic which may make Nietzsche's formula ontologically intelligible: an existent entity cannot be undefined, as the fallen Achilles would have it. Sartre's annihilation of "I" does not leave the subject as a non-essential subject in the world, as *Nausea* may have it, but as a non-existent object in the void, thus the absurdity of Achilles' normative statement, reformulated once more: "It is better to be *undefined* in the world than *defined* in the Void"—the former leads to nausea—a degenerative, fatal symptom on the path toward self-annihilation—and the latter is illogical; this is nevertheless the *logos* of modernity. Phenomenally, this mentality manifests in Satan's arc and attitude, but the only resolution is the miserable embrace of the absurdity of non-existence, as Satan says when he first finds himself cast down to chaos, "Hail horrors! hail, / Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell, / Receive thy new possessor." In fact, Satan is not the possessor of Hell (the void), but is

Stockholm Syndromically possessed by it—"He himself is hell"—the object of definition by the void having unheroically turned from Being—the villainous denial of "I Am."

Being and Heroism

*O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is
the life of my spirit...*

Isaiah 38:16

Who are we to tell the hero who he is? I am that *I am*. But whatever does necessarily follow from Being and whatever else may be self-defined can perhaps be differentiated. In the latter case, the *that-I-am-ness* (accidental essence) of the subject can be seen in the difference in the heroism of Achilles and Odysseus: the one is warlike the other diplomatic, one violent one subtle, one reclusive one socialiable. The self-defined essence of Being per se is itself therefore one of its necessary virtues—the hero is not defined by his world but independent of it by himself—by his own volition and taste; his identity belongs to himself. He will neither be conglomerated, synthesized, nor assimilated. Indeed, it would be sin for him to assume that *he-is-not*—to fall prey to the temptation *to be* what is not of himself. His forehead is like iron, he knows who he is, and he alone. “Why do you ask my name seeing that it is a secret?” Which is to say, *I am*.

¹²⁴ *Henry V*, 5.2.281

¹²⁵ “Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, / Missing me one place search another, / I stop somewhere waiting for you.” *Song of Myself*, 52

The hero knows what is honorable—what merits the title of being virtuous, because he is de jure and de facto virtuous and honorable. As Henry V says, “we are the makers of manners.”¹²⁴ That which is good is that which *is*, that which is evil is that which *is not*. The hero asserts himself to dominate the void. The hero imposes the essence of his existence onto Nothingness and creates his world. He *wills* and there *is*. In his reflection there is order. There is beauty because he sees. By his Being in the world there is technique, and through his meditation in the plane of the ideal and descension therefrom, he gives form to matter; there is honey from the rock—art. The beasts of the earth are meat for the hero, and faith is his substance.

Brave disclosure is erudition. The invitation to his world is learning. The ordering of his world is technology, which is wisdom. The offering of power with his Being is love, like Whitman¹²⁵, who awaits the fulfillment of what now is only a blossoming into a full inheritance; of the realization of all known into experience—the complete mutuality of oneness in the world, is to live¹²⁶—like the brightness of the sun at noon, who being the expression of pure daytime, walks in the immediacy of a life asserted, the presence of such a one even we can hardly endure, but can only acknowledge as a terrible hope that in the next age the immensity of our seeing into each other may be sustained by the transfiguration of our

¹²⁶ The illuminated body of the wanderer.

bodies by that Man who could uphold the weight of such glory.

The essence of Being is existence, which is Morality.

[...] is death.

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